Palestine, Climate Justice and Intersectionality

The intrinsic interconnectedness of humanity's fight for human rights and justice across the globe

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Contents

Sections	Page number
Introduction	4
1. The climate crisis and Israel's atrocities in Palestine	8
2. Why is the mass murder of an entire defenceless population in Gaza not considered a matter of 'saving the planet'?	15
3. The special case of Western powers' hypocrisy on their climate agendas of 'saving the planet'	17
3.1 How wars and occupation exacerbate the global climate crisis	18
3.2 World leaders cannot be claiming to combat climate change while funding and enabling militarism and occupation in the same breath	21
3.3 For argument's sake, what if Israel used 'eco-friendly' bombs? A cautionary tale for the climate movement to not inadvertently decenter human lives	22
4. "The climate apocalypse is not some abstract future possibility. It's already here."	25
5. Intersectionality—we need more of it in the climate movement	28
6. Climate change and its inextricable links to systemic racism	31
7. Climate colonialism	36
8. Even as victims of climate change are disproportionately non-White, the climate movement remains overwhelmingly White	39
9. How the climate movement decentered people and risked itself being out of touch	41

10. Colonial power structures still intact—the West's historical responsibility for climate change extends beyond the loss and damage fund	43
11. Mainstreaming intersectionality and a system-change focus—demystifying and growing the climate movement	47
12. What a system change approach and intersectional climate movement look like and how it will address the 'bread and butter' issues	54
12.1 What a system change approach fundamentally looks like	54
12.2 How climate action helps address bread and butter issues	55
12.3 "It's time for revolutionary change"	58
12.4 "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere"	60

Note:

- 1. The images used throughout are representational.
- 2. The author has taken the liberty to capitalise terms like 'White', 'Global North' and 'Global South' in direct quotes from external sources where they weren't necessarily capitalised.
- 3. The opinions expressed are those of the author alone.

Death, dehumanisation, forced starvation, imminent famine—for people in Palestine, this, and more, have been the everyday reality for the past nine months. Israel's ongoing war on Palestine, funded mainly by the U.S., and allowed to happen with impunity by other Western powers, has claimed over 38,000 lives since October 2023. 40% of those killed are estimated to be children.

All the gory, egregious details of the war, which the International Court of Justice has ruled as amounting to plausible genocide, are being broadcast and live-streamed daily—whilst being indelibly etched in our collective consciousness. The U.S., Germany, Italy, the U.K. and Canada are, in descending order, the biggest suppliers of arms to Israel, with the U.S. accounting for 66% and Germany 30%.

Israel's war on Palestine spares no one and in no form. Every 10 minutes, Israel kills or wounds a child in Palestine, said <u>UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk on April 23rd.</u> "Close to 21,000 children are estimated to be missing in the chaos of the war in Gaza, many trapped beneath rubble, detained, buried in unmarked graves, or lost from their families." <u>said Save the Children on June 24th.</u>



Credit: <u>rrodrickbeiler</u>

Al-Walaja, Occupied Palestinian Territories - August 27, 2011

Pictures of 10-year-old Gazan boy Yazan Kafarneh's gaunt and skeletal face, with his skull protruding through his pallid skin, emerged recently as a chilling reminder of the accelerating starvation crisis in Gaza, which the Israeli government is using as a method of warfare. Yazan later died due to malnutrition.

Famine is imminent in Northern Gaza, where 70% of the population are already suffering with catastrophic levels of hunger, a United Nations-backed report from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) in March found. This is the "highest number of people facing catastrophic hunger ever recorded... anywhere, anytime," by the IPC, said United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. More recently, in July, several UN independent experts said that "there is no doubt that famine has spread from northern Gaza into central and southern Gaza."

Death is increasingly becoming hard to escape in Gaza, even for newborn babies. As of mid-March, the number of children Israel killed in Gaza in four months of war exceeds the total number of children killed in global conflicts in the last four years. I shudder to fathom what threshold of barbarism the prolonged atrocities will mark, as Israel's massacre continues unabated—and what this means particularly for the tens of thousands of innocent children, who make up roughly half of Gaza's population.

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A recent letter published in the Lancet medical journal said that the number of reported deaths in Gaza since October 2023 is likely an underestimate - around 38,000 at the time of writing this piece - pointing at the catastrophic indirect health implications of the violence Israel is inflicting.

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¹Human Rights Watch, Oxfam, European Union

Applying what it described as a "conservative estimate", the authors of this letter stated that it is not implausible to estimate that up to 186 000 or even more deaths could be attributable to Israel's current assaults on Gaza.

Words aren't enough to capture the gravity of Israel's crimes in Gaza, but the facts and headings below², drawn from a range of media, human rights and intergovernmental organisations, do shed light on (at least a fraction of) the dehumanisation and barbarism Israel is waging in Gaza, which a range of scholars and organisations have deemed a genocide.³



What these shocking facts and statistics emerging from Israel's atrocities do not reveal, however, are the unique and vivid lives, stories and dreams of the tens of thousands of people who were killed, and of those left behind to grieve. Not to mention the <u>thousands of people</u> still trapped under the rubble of their destroyed homes.

² <u>Democracy Now & here; Financial Times; Oxfam; United Nations & here & here; TRT World; Al Jazeera & here; The Guardian; Human Rights Watch; The Telegraph;</u>

³ <u>United Nations</u> & <u>here</u> & <u>here</u> & <u>here</u>; <u>Israeli Holocaust Scholar Raz Segal</u>

Prominent Gazan journalist Plestia Alaqad's <u>words on 12th March</u>, which marked day 157 of Israel's current hostilities, ring true:

"At this point, I feel so speechless, what more should I say or shed light on? Everything has been said yet nothing has changed."

It's important to understand that Israel's atrocities in Gaza, described as the world's largest open-air prison, did not start nine months ago, in the wake of Hamas' horrifying attack. Settler colonialism and apartheid regime⁴ are terms used by the <u>United Nations</u> and <u>Amnesty International</u> respectively - in addition to other organisations - to describe Israel's occupation and siege of Palestinian territories, which has been in place for the past many decades. <u>Few Palestinians have escaped serious rights abuses during this 50-year occupation</u>, said Human Rights Watch in 2017. Also important to remember is that the current atrocities have their underpinnings in the decades of denial and inaction by the international community,⁵ particularly the U.S. and European countries who otherwise claim to be the upholders of democracy and human rights across the globe.

As <u>Francesca Albanese</u>, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, said in late March,

"The genocide in Gaza is the most extreme stage of a long-standing settler colonial process of erasure of the native Palestinian...(the) colonial amnesia of the West has condoned Israel's colonial settler project...the world now sees the bitter fruit of the impunity afforded to Israel. This was a tragedy foretold."

⁴<u>Amnesty:</u> "Apartheid is a violation of public international law, a grave violation of internationally protected human rights and a crime against humanity under international criminal law."

⁵ United Nations: Visualising Palestine



Credit: rrodrickbeiler

Hebron, Occupied Palestinian Territories - November 15, 2012: Palestinian girls pass an Israeli military checkpoint in the Old City of Hebron, West Bank

1. The climate crisis and Israel's atrocities in Palestine

There's yet another crisis that shares the same root causes of the apocalyptic situation unfolding in Gaza. It's the climate crisis. Yet, as a climate movement, we don't talk about Palestine enough—we never have. Not even now, when our social media and news are rife with disconcerting visuals of Israel's massacre—like that of decapitated babies, charred bodies, children starving to death, and people carrying the body parts of their loved ones in plastic bags.

While many climate and environmental organisations are denouncing Israel's atrocities and advocating for Palestine - and this is indeed very heartening, as every effort counts - it still falls short of *taking centre stage of the movement's everyday work and focus areas*. And this is particularly glaring given the inextricable links between Israel's settler colonialism in Palestine and the climate crisis—as well as the larger context of combating the climate crisis through an intersectional and human-rights approach.



As 350 Australia puts it,

"We strive for justice and work for not only a carbon emissions free future, but a world free of the injustice that has caused the crisis – and this includes militarism and imperialism."

What is happening in Palestine currently is the latest manifestation of intersecting factors like settler colonialism, extractivism and apartheid. Israel's decades-long occupation and siege of Palestinian territories is a stark reminder of the forces of settler colonialism, apartheid, extractivism, systemic racism, racialised capitalism, Islamophobia and White supremacy that continue to ravage the world, especially where people have been systemically marginalised.

Similarly, the systemic factors of colonialism, extractivism, racialised capitalism and deep-rooted economic systems that prioritise profits over people's well-being—which drive overconsumption and exploitation of people and the planet—are the root causes⁶ of the climate crisis.

As 'Confronting injustice: racism and the environmental emergency', a 2022 joint report from Greenpeace and the Runnymede Trust puts it:

"The outcomes of the environmental emergency cannot be understood without reference to the history of British and European colonialism,

⁶ <u>Greenpeace UK, Asad Rehman, Friends of the Earth EWNI, Jason Hickel, Intersectional Environmentalist, Naomi Klein, Greta Thunberg</u>

which set in motion a global model for racialised resource extraction from people of colour... Systemic racism and colonialism driven by powerful governments and companies are at the heart of the environmental emergency we face today... This is particularly clear when looking at the extraction of global fossil fuels, commodities and plastic waste systems. A racist disregard for the lives and livelihoods of people of colour and Indigenous Peoples has not only left these communities worst affected by the unfolding climate crisis, but continues their oppression today."

For the first time in 30 years, the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'s 2022 assessment report included the term colonialism in its report, describing it as an ongoing issue that is exacerbating communities' vulnerability to climate change. With this report being the document that world leaders peruse during negotiations at the COP, there is now more *mainstream recognition* of the significant role colonialism continues to play in bringing about climate change—which earlier was mostly confined to climate justice narratives (more on why this should be mainstreamed within the climate movement later).

As American climate justice activist Elizabeth Yeampierre said,

"Climate change is the legacy of extraction, of colonialism, of slavery."

Not only are these root systemic causes of climate change not discussed enough, the climate movement also doesn't centre justice enough, when, at its core, climate change is a matter of injustice. In fact, the climate justice movement tends to be considered as an add-on to the mainstream climate movement—almost like an afterthought embellishment that the movement can otherwise do without.

This is while "injustice is at the root of the climate crisis, with multinational corporations and rich, White countries like the U.S., U.K. and Australia reaping the benefits of burning carbon and exploiting resources, leaving low-income communities to suffer the consequences", as explained by <u>Friends of the Earth England</u>, <u>Wales and Northern Ireland</u>. Countries in the <u>Global North are responsible for 92% of the world's excess carbon dioxide emissions</u>, while it is countries in the Global South that are disproportionately impacted by climate change⁷.

https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jun/25/climate-apartheid-united-nations-expert-says-human-rights-may-not-survive-crisis

https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/challenges/environmental-justice/race-environmental-emergency-report/

The real, lived experiences of people and the very real, complex and interconnected crises they suffer due to climate change also don't feature enough in the climate movement. The victims of climate change are also disproportionately systemically marginalised communities⁸ - another important detail that is often overlooked in the climate movement.

Framing Climate Justice, a year-long U.K. based participatory cross-movement project, which is a joint collaboration between PIRC, NEON and 350, <u>captures the essence of climate justice</u> <u>succinctly here:</u>

"Climate justice is about putting global justice strongly into the frame. It is about framing climate change through the prism of colonialism and empire; acknowledging that those who are most affected are the least responsible; recognising the ways in which climate change multiples existing oppressions, and advocating solutions that redistribute power and centre the most affected communities.

It is about making the debate wider than an overly narrow focus on topics like emissions targets, or green technologies. It's about moving on from simply convincing everyone that 'humans cause climate change' to an understanding of 'which humans, and which systems'. It's about shifting gears from 'humans need to act' to 'who needs to do what, and why."

https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(22)00090-0/fulltexthtps://www.unicef.org/reports/climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis

⁸ Systematically marginalised people are those that experience discrimination and exclusion owing to deep-rooted structural and institutionalised inequalities and power imbalances, that are normalised and embedded in the functionings of society at large.



Climate injustice, racial injustice, colonialism, neocolonialism, neoliberal capitalism, extractivism, fossil fuel extractivism, gender injustice, migrant injustice etc. are all interconnected— and so do the approaches and solutions to tackle these issues have to be, too.

The story of how Asad Rehman, executive director of anti-poverty charity War on Want (Asad is also the former Head of International Climate with Friends of the Earth EWNI), got involved in climate activism serves as a testimony to the importance of a system change approach to addressing the climate crisis, as well as the need to centre justice and human rights. It also illuminates how Israel's war on Palestine and the climate crisis are inextricably linked, and why the climate movement should be pulling out all the stops to stop the same.

Rehman admits to starting off as a <u>'reluctant environmentalist'</u>. "It (the climate movement) seemed to be about polar bears on icebergs and why we must use the right light bulbs and not use plastic straws. There was no understanding of deeper, systemic issues..." <u>he is quoted saying in this interview with Karen Thomas in CIWEM</u>.

But as his political work expanded, it dawned on him that "far from being a distant, technical problem for others to worry about, the climate crisis – and the injustice it created – were central to everything he was fighting for", as he's quoted saying in this interview in The Guardian with Matthew Taylor.

In Glasgow, at the UN climate summit, Rehman spearheaded a global network of indigenous activists, civil society campaigners, trade unionists, anti racists and youth climate strikers that "put justice and anti-colonialism at the heart of the debate". They recognised that "the climate

emergency could not be solved without addressing the underlying economic system that produces it".

"We have spent years and years building the movement," Rehman is quoted saying in The Guardian interview with Matthew Taylor. "Making the argument that this is a systemic crisis, that it is about racialised capitalism, making the case that you cannot understand the climate crisis without understanding that there is an arch from slavery to colonialism and imperialism to the climate crisis ... We wanted to build a diverse movement to put justice – social, ecological, racial and gender – at its heart, and be a powerful voice to hold rich countries to account for causing the crisis."



In tandem with such perspectives prevalent in the climate justice movement, our understanding of what issue falls within the ambit of the climate movement should also broaden beyond those that are (more explicitly and conventionally understood to be) caused by/related to climate issues. It's not enough that issues relating to climate disasters, melting glaciers, endangered species, emissions, sustainability—and similar topics conventionally and historically deemed to be climate issues⁹—are the only issues the climate movement works hard to tackle. The underlying systems, injustices and root causes that brought about the climate crisis, and continue to aggravate the crisis, should also be taken into account—just as much—by the climate movement.

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⁹ https://framingclimatejustice.org/resources/

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Similarly, with what's happening in Palestine now, where the same injustices and systems that caused the climate crisis are playing out, taking efforts to stop Israel's war should (also) form the forefront of the climate movement. The understanding of 'climate costs' should broaden to include the costs borne by humanity due to the systems and underlying root causes behind climate change. Otherwise, we would end up with a tone-deaf climate movement disproportionately—or worse, only—focussing on issues like climate related disasters, emissions, melting glaciers, carbon budgets etc., while a genocide unfolds with impunity. While militarism, colonialism, imperialism, extractivism, and racialised capitalism - the root causes of the climate crisis - continue to ravage human lives and nature.

After all, as this article in Yes! said,

"Climate justice is racial justice is migrant justice is gender justice."

2. Why is the mass murder of an entire defenceless population in Gaza not considered a matter of 'saving the planet'?



And yet, even as human lives—along with nature—are being decimated by Israel amid the latest gruesome manifestation of their settler-colonialism and apartheid in Palestine, the general consensus seems to be that it's not entirely a matter concerning the climate movement. Even when the climate movement has addressed the issue, it came saddled with this veneer of it being an unusual nexus, as if it's an add-on and a mere act of supporting other causes, or standing in solidarity with *separate* causes.

In fact, many climate organisations drew criticism for advocating for Palestine amid accusations of radicalisation and politicisation, with climate activists described as "divided on the strategic value of championing causes that go beyond fossil fuels. "Gaza becomes flashpoint for climate activists," the same article stated. A media article went so far as to publish an article with the title 'Greta Thunberg's Stand With Gaza Is A Problem For The Climate Change Movement', stating that she was "not advancing an environmental cause". Another one said: "Has Greta Thunberg betrayed the climate movement?"

This is while the root, systemic factors which led us to the current state of climate emergency have been playing out in Palestine for over half a century, with Israel's current

atrocities being the latest manifestation of it. The cognitive dissonance of this is appalling. This is also while fossil fuels are among the underlying drivers for the Western-sanctioned bloodshed in Palestine, as Friends of the Earth Ireland said in a blog.

That the genocide is at least partly about the billions of barrels of oil in Palestine is something many advocates believe. To be sure, a USA-Israel energy cooperation agreement stipulates that "United States-Israel energy cooperation and the development of natural resources by Israel are in the strategic interest of the United States", promising to assist Israel with "regional safety and security issues". Furthermore, "Israeli jets and tanks bombarding Palestinians are being fuelled by some of the world's most profitable fossil fuel companies", as per research cited in The Guardian.

Why is it that when a genocidal government, backed by powerful Western nations, deliberately and systematically snuffs out people's lives and natural resources, it is dividing the climate movement¹⁰ which is otherwise about protecting people and the planet? Why is the mass murder of an entire defenceless population in Palestine not considered a matter of 'saving the planet'?

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https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/oct/23/backlash-over-european-climate-activists -support-for-palestine

https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/should-a-climate-activist-stand-up-for-gaza/

 $\frac{https://www.irishtimes.com/environment/climate-crisis/2023/12/06/how-gaza-has-become-a-critical-issue-for-climate-activism-no-climate-justice-without-peace/$

https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/dec/05/no-climate-justice-without-peace-gaza-b ecomes-flashpoint-for-climate-activists

https://www.forbes.com/sites/jonmcgowan/2023/10/25/greta-thunbergs-stand-with-gaza-is-a-problem-for-the-climate-change-movement/?sh=62a55097375c

 $\underline{https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/a-potential-rift-in-the-climate-movement-what-s-next-for-greta-thunberg-a-2491673f-2d42-4e2c-bbd7-bab53432b687}$



Credit: rrodrickbeiler

Bethlehem, Occupied Palestinian Territories - November 2012: Palestinian children hold signs protesting Israeli military strikes on Gaza, especially their effects on children, during a vigil in Bethlehem's Manger Square.

3. The special case of Western powers' hypocrisy on their climate agendas of 'saving the planet'

This becomes all the more conspicuous because the current war on Palestine is enabled by decades of Western nations' inaction in the face of Israel's mounting crimes—and oftentimes, even the funding of it—when these are the same nations that claim to have climate at the top of their agendas. (They also claim to be the upholders of democracy and human rights across the world.)

U.S. President Biden, for instance, <u>recently proclaimed</u> he's "taking the most significant action ever on climate in the history of the world"—this is while he <u>bypassed Congress</u> twice in <u>December to sell Israel over \$250 million in weapons</u>, while also also vetoing

three UN resolutions for a ceasefire in Gaza (ever since Israel's current atrocities started in October 2023). In the U.N. resolution in March demanding a ceasefire for just a few weeks, the U.S. abstained from voting. The Washington Post reported in March that this is in addition to the US "quietly approving and delivering" more than 100 separate foreign military sales to Israel since October 7th. U.S.-supplied weapons provided to the Israeli government have been used in serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, said Amnesty International USA in May.

What is more, the Biden administration is also set to greenlight \$18 billion sale of F-15 fighter jets to Israel, reports said in April. In fact, Israel has one of the world's most powerful militaries, thanks to the more than \$3.8bn of military aid a year it receives from the U.S. Israel is also the most significant recipient of U.S. foreign aid, having received some \$263bn between 1946 and 2023.

How can Biden–or anyone–claim to care about climate action and saving the planet when he's enabling the same root systemic causes that resulted in the climate crisis to play out in Palestine now, butchering lives? When the U.S. has funded the killing of over 38,000 people in what the UN has said is a plausible genocide? How do funding a genocide and the 'saving of the planet' go hand in hand? Is it racism? Islamophobia? White supremacy? "All lives" actually not mattering? Surely world leaders cannot be blind to the climate cost¹¹ of militarism, even if they can't find it in them to care about certain people's lives.

3.1 How wars and occupation exacerbate the global climate crisis

The planet-warming emissions generated by aerial and ground attacks during *just the first 120 days of the war on Gaza* - at the time of writing this piece, more than 250 days have passed since the current atrocities began - *were greater than the annual carbon footprint of 26 of the world's most climate-vulnerable nations* according to research cited in an article in The Guardian. Drawing on the same research, this article by Nina Lakhani said: "According to the calculation, which is almost certainly a significant underestimate due to missing military emissions data, the carbon cost of the first 120 days of Israel's assault

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¹¹This paper argues that climate costs include the costs borne by humanity due to systems and underlying root causes behind climate change, too, but its usage here specifically is in the context of the conventional usage of the term 'climate costs' - which mostly only entails a cost to the climate and environment caused by an immediate climate issue (or what is conventionally understood to be regarded as a climate issue).

on Gaza was equivalent to the combined annual energy use of 77,200 American households."



The carbon cost of rebuilding Gaza will be greater than the annual greenhouse gas emissions generated individually by 135 countries, the article said. "Reconstructing the estimated 200,000 apartment buildings, schools, universities, hospitals, mosques, bakeries, water and sewage plants damaged and destroyed by Israel in the first four months of the war on Gaza will generate as much as 60m tonnes of CO2 equivalent (tCO2e)," according to the research cited by The Guardian. "This is on a par with the total 2022 emissions generated by countries such as Portugal and Sweden – and more than twice the annual emissions of Afghanistan," the article further said.

The carbon cost of the first 120 days of Israel's assault on Gaza was equivalent to the combined annual energy use of 77,200 American households.

In early November, barely a month into Israel's current atrocities, <u>Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor</u> said that, by then, Israel had (already) dropped more than 25,000 tons of explosives on the Gaza Strip since the start of its large-scale war on 7 October—equivalent to *two nuclear bombs*.

Yet another article in The Guardian, six months into the current atrocities, said:

"Satellite analysis revealed to the Guardian shows farms devastated and nearly half of the territory's trees razed. Alongside mounting air and water pollution, experts say Israel's onslaught on Gaza's ecosystems has made the area unlivable. Researchers and environmental organisations say the destruction will have enormous effects on Gaza's ecosystems and biodiversity. The scale and potential long-term impact of the damage have led to calls for it to be regarded as "ecocide" and investigated as a possible war crime."



Militaries worldwide generally are <u>estimated to account for almost 5.5% of global greenhouse</u> <u>gas emissions</u> annually— *more than the aviation and shipping industries combined.* If the world's militaries were a country, this figure would mean they have the fourth largest national carbon footprint in the world, according to the <u>same study by Scientists for Global</u> <u>Responsibility</u>. In all likelihood, this could be an underestimation thanks to what Benjamin Neimark, a senior lecturer and researcher, referred to as the <u>military's environmental</u> exceptionalism, "which allows them to pollute with impunity as if the carbon emissions spitting from their tanks and fighter jets don't count" in this earlier article in The Guardian by Nina <u>Lakhani</u>.

Overall, the climate consequences of war and occupation - and military emissions at large - are shrouded in secrecy and rarely accounted for. Owing largely to pressure from the U.S., reporting

military emissions is voluntary, and *only four countries* submit some incomplete data to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which organises the annual climate talks, the same article in The Guardian said. There is a need for greater accountability of military emissions. (As a side note, the Irish Government is not an innocent bystander in all of this as "almost 1,200 civil flights carrying weapons were allowed to travel across Irish airspace last year, the highest number in six years, prompting concerns that some of these weapons are being used in Israel's war on Gaza").

Zena Agha, policy analyst at Al-Shabaka, the Palestinian Policy Network, is quoted in this article in <u>The Guardian</u>, saying:

"Quite apart from the unspeakable destruction in Gaza and across Palestine, this report lays bare the hypocrisy of Western nations who moralise about the perils of climate breakdown and the responsibility of every nation to protect the planet – all the while funding, aiding and enabling the Israeli regime's catastrophic war and its implications for those affected by ongoing and future climate change."



3.2 World leaders cannot be claiming to combat climate change while funding and enabling militarism and occupation in the same breath

So if the butchering of tens of thousands of children, the use of starvation as a method of warfare, the murder of starving people queuing up for aid, and a looming famine couldn't get the climate movement to *care enough*, and for world leaders to *care at all*, surely, at least these egregious facts pointing to the ecological ramifications of militarism should. World leaders need

to be held accountable to their tall claims and promises—they cannot be claiming to combat climate change while in the same breath funding and enabling genocidal governments to ravage human lives and nature.

But the cracks are beginning to show—people are finally starting to see through the facade of Western powers, particularly the U.S., being the (so-called) bastions of human rights and democracy, as well as their claims of 'democracy promotion' in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region through problematic interventions and policies.

In the wake of the global outcry and uproar over Israel's killing of aid workers from World Central Kitchen in early April—six out of seven of them from Western nations—<u>The Independent had this as its front page</u>, where it said:

"It may seem wrong that, after more than 30,000 Palestinians in Gaza have perished, it took the deaths of just seven international aid workers to stir Western governments into a sense of outrage, but this is the reality...They have become symbolic of the lawless and reckless manner in which Benjamin Netanyahu has prosecuted this war..."

As Avishan Chanani reminded in this poignant post:

"It was more than enough at every single juncture since 7th October when 41,496 Palestinians¹² were mercilessly killed... It was more than enough when a new phrase had to be entered into existence: wounded child no surviving family (wcnsf). It's been over 75 years when it's been more than enough."

This horrific incident has reinforced what has been glaringly obvious through the past nine months—that all lives are indeed not weighted equally and that international law exists to serve only certain people's lives. <u>As Nesrine Malik said</u> way back in November: "The war in Gaza has been an intense lesson in Western hypocrisy. It won't be forgotten."

3.3 For argument's sake, what if Israel used 'eco-friendly' bombs? A cautionary tale for the climate movement to not inadvertently decenter human lives

While such research and statistics that point to such 'climate costs' of the war in Gaza are important, we need to be mindful of discussing the climate costs of wars and occupation, and its (inextricable) links to the climate movement, *disproportionately - or only -* in terms of the emissions polluting the air; decimated trees and other natural resources; carbon costs of reconstruction etc.

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¹² This is the number stated by the author of the post.



Credit:vichinterlang

Jerusalem, Israel - Aug. 9, 2002: A young Palestinian woman and her son wait for someone to enter the city from the West Bank at an Israel checkpoint

The deliberate and cold-blooded mass murder of an entire defenceless community, of actual human lives, and of the lives of tens of thousands of innocent children snuffed out, should be enough proof of Israel's war on Palestine being a 'climate issue'. Importantly, the settler colonialism and occupation that has been in place for decades should be enough proof of Israel's atrocities in Palestine amounting to a climate issue.

Whenever environmental and climate organisations have addressed the topic of Palestine to explain its links to the climate movement, while well-intentioned, the focus has been disproportionately—if not only—on the dire impact of Israel's attacks in terms of the greenhouse gas emissions; the carbon cost of rebuilding Gaza's damaged buildings etc. Don't get me wrong, these *are* indeed glaring, egregious evidence of the catastrophic impact Israel's war has on climate—and humanity at large, **for times to come**.

But inadvertently or not, it runs the risk of conveying the tacit message that the 'climate costs' are separate and different from the cost of all the human lives lost—that the climate movement doesn't centre or serve the real lived experiences of people. And that these 'climate costs' do not

take into account the forces of militarism, colonialism and extractivism at play in Palestine. For argument's sake - and forgive me as I resort to hyperboles here - what if Israel used "eco-friendly" bombs? What if they stepped the pedal on their existing greenwashing efforts and vowed to remove the heaps of rubble that is now Gaza and reconstruct all the homes destroyed in the most "sustainable" manner? What if it even builds an ecological utopian marvel there, once they have wiped out all the people? Will the Israeli occupation and the current atrocities still be considered part of the climate movement?



Have we, as a movement, institutionally and historically failed to centre people, human rights and justice at the core of the climate movement? When climate change is inherently and intrinsically a matter of justice?

The climate movement fundamentally exists to prevent human and environmental suffering and deaths - but does this suffering have to be caused by an ecological issue (in its most conventional understanding) for it to fall under the purview of the climate movement?¹⁴ Is it not enough that

https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/12/12/how-arab-eco-normalisation-of-israel-covers-up-its-crimes

https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/11/30/cop28-israel-should-not-be-allowed-to-greenwas h-its-war-on-gaza

 $\frac{https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/10/5/interwoven-struggles-the-green-paradox-meets-the-paradox}{e-palestine-paradox}$

¹³ https://iournals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/25148486211069898

¹⁴ Sidenote - Climate issues also don't occur in a vacuum, all the climate change-related atrocities we are seeing are thanks to years of fossil fuel extractivism and capitalistic systems that put profits before people.

the root causes of climate change - colonialism and extractivism - is decimating people's lives and natural resources in Gaza?

Similar to Rishika Pardikar's thoughts <u>here</u>, it's important to reflect on what drives us to combat climate change,

"Some of you guys really need to explain why you want the world to tackle climate change. If mass death and suffering (Gaza) doesn't disturb you, I really have no reason to believe that climate-related death and suffering does. Climate is then just a fun puzzle to solve."

4. "The climate apocalypse is not some abstract future possibility. *It's already here*."

In our quest to protect our future from absolute climate chaos, the climate movement tends to not draw enough attention to the fact that millions of lives in the global majority *are already torn apart by climate change*. There's a disproportionate emphasis in climate communications on a 'future at risk'.

In our quest to protect our future from absolute climate chaos, the climate movement tends to not draw enough attention to the fact that millions of lives in the global majority are *already* torn apart by climate change. There's a disproportionate emphasis in climate communications on a 'future at risk'.

As economic anthropologist <u>Jason Hickel puts it</u>,

"Already, 30 million people around the globe are displaced each year because of global climate change. For these people, the climate apocalypse is not some abstract future possibility. It's already here."

Leah Thomas, environmentalist and founder of the non-profit collective Intersectional Environmentalist, eloquently describes the tendency of the climate movement to overlook the ramifications happening in the present, in this YES! Media interview with Nylah Burton:

"I've heard so many White conservationists that are sounding the alarms for their great-great-grandchildren. But do you [expect] me, as a Black woman, to ignore the present-day reality for my people who are endangered because there is lead in their drinking water, not enough trees in their neighborhoods and [who are] experiencing natural disasters and sea-level rise?

You want me to put that aside, and for all of the philanthropic funding to go toward protecting the future for your great great-grandchildren? Am I not good enough? In the present, my little cousins aren't good enough?

That's so steeped in racism and it's really, really frustrating. This focus on either the future, or animals in the wild, is a deflection from having to acknowledge the reality of what's going on now for so many marginalized communities."

On a parallel note, aren't the unfathomable cruelties inflicted by the Israeli government on people and nature—powered by decades of Western nations' inaction and exoneration of the occupation—and on the children of Gaza not enough for the climate movement to prioritise advocating for Gaza?



Sarah Jaquette Ray, an environmental humanist, who works at the intersection of social justice and climate emotions, also reminds us of the perils of not just overtly focusing on the future in the climate movement, but also of the lack of a systemic, nuanced approach that takes into account the root, historic causes. She wrote:

"The prospect of an unlivable future has always shaped the emotional terrain for Black and brown people, whether that terrain is racism or climate change. Climate change compounds existing structures of injustice, and those structures exacerbate climate change. Exhaustion, anger, hope—the effects of oppression and resistance are not unique to this climate moment.

What is unique is that people who had been insulated from oppression are now waking up to the prospect of their own unlivable future. Today's progressives espouse climate change as the "greatest existential threat of our time," a claim that ignores people who have been experiencing existential threats for much longer. Slavery, colonialism, ongoing police brutality—we can't neglect history to save the future."

5. Intersectionality—we need more of it in the climate movement

"Historically, the environmental movement and conservation efforts have been dominated by White, middle and upper class perspectives excluding critical challenges that marginalised communities face such as racism, poverty and gender inequality," <u>said Intersectional Environmentalist</u>. The question of *why* still looms large—why is it that the climate movement is finding itself unable to draw in the very people that climate change disproportionately impacts? There are several reasons, but the lack of an intersectional, human rights-based approach to discussing and addressing climate change —which also centres justice—is the main overarching reason.

So, what is intersectionality and what does this mean specifically in the climate movement? "Intersectionality" was coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a civil rights activist and legal scholar, to describe how multiple forms of social identity like race, class, gender and caste "intersect" and interact with each other, distinctly impacting the way people across these social categories experience the world. <u>The United Nations</u> describes it the following way:

"Intersectionality is a concept and theoretical framework that facilitate recognition of the complex ways in which social identities overlap and, in negative scenarios, can create compounding experiences of discrimination and concurrent forms of oppression."

Dr. Skyler Jackson, Associate Research Scientist at the Yale School of Medicine, sheds light on another facet of intersectionality here:

"Systems of power and oppression such as White supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, heterosexism do not occur in isolation. These systems interlock and collide and cooperate, to create something greater than the sum of their parts."

Intersectionality also means understanding how these different systems of power, oppression and marginalisation interact, intersect and overlap in affecting and compounding how different communities experience the same crisis in unique, distinct ways. For instance, patriarchy, systemic racism, White supremacy and capitalism collide and intersect in the way a woman of colour in a low-income country experiences the ravages of the climate crisis, which would be starkly different from the impact of climate change as experienced by a White man from a rich,

developed Western nation. The impact of climate change differs across race, class, caste and gender lines and an approach that doesn't factor this would simply be tone-deaf and futile.

What human rights violations and climate change imply for people in Palestine and how they experience its impact, parallelly, would be a far cry from how people in a Western, developed country would experience the same. Can you imagine a similar scale of violence and inhumanity being inflicted on people in a Western country the way it is happening in Palestine? Will the world still find ways to justify the killing of over 14,000 children had it happened in a Western nation? In terms of the death toll, Israel has waged a war, equivalent to twelve 9/11 attacks, on Palestine in nine months. Settler colonialism, apartheid, extractivism and racialised capitalism are not mere remnants from the past for people in Palestine—it's very much a part of their current realities.

An intersectional approach to climate change also means identifying the ways in which injustices happening to the marginalised communities and the planet are interconnected, as <u>pointed out by Intersectional Environmentalist</u>. Climate change can in fact be described as the result of hundreds of years of powerful nations and corporations exploiting nature and people, especially the systemically marginalised, for the sake of profits.

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The need for intersectionality in climate movements is captured in a simple—and quirky—manner in a report by Sapna South Asian Climate Solidarity titled 'Why North-South Intersectionality Matters in Climate Justice: Perspectives of South Asian Australian Youth Climate Activists' 15 wherein Namrata, a young activist of Indian origin, is described as saying

¹⁵ Talukdar, R., 2022, 'Why North-South Intersectionality Matters for Climate Justice: Perspectives of South

that she drew support from the intersectional work of other South Asian climate activists who could say in meetings that,

"I should be able to talk about my house burning down over your love for dolphins."

"Through such assertions of their embodied experiences, they are not only asking for a nuancing of the main climate story in the (Australian) climate movement that focuses on 'our futures at risk'; they are also arguing for a human justice approach to activism," the <u>re4."The climate apocalypse is not some abstract future possibility. It's already here."</u>
port said. Sapna is supported by Tipping Point, a project of Friends of the Earth Australia.

Nazia, a young activist of Bangladeshi origin, is also quoted echoing similar sentiments:

"We unfortunately talk only about how Australia's future is at risk. It is a privilege actually to still be able to talk about the future. In the Indian subcontinent, flooding happens every year. It is now!"

6. Climate change and its inextricable links to systemic racism

I argue that intersectionality shouldn't be an add on—the climate movement must have it embedded across everything it does. The need for an intersectional approach to climate change, along with a focus on the root systemic causes of it, become all the more important as climate change is also inextricably linked to systemic racism—in fact it's "inherently racist". ¹⁶

Asian Australian Youth Climate Activists', Report published by Sapna South Asian Climate Solidarity, Sydney.

¹⁶ Greenpeace UK, Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Greenpeace USA



Those who least contributed to the climate crisis, who are mainly people of colour, are the ones who are disproportionately impacted by climate change, because of deep-rooted structural inequalities stemming from the legacy of colonialism, systemic racism, racialised capitalism and extractivism. Countries in the <u>Global North are responsible for 92% of the world's excess carbon dioxide emissions</u>, while those in the Global South are responsible for just 8%. <u>The Global North is also responsible for 74% of excess material use</u>, half of which is extracted in the Global South.

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And yet, developing countries will bear an estimated 75% of the costs of the climate crisis, according to Philip Alston, UN special rapporteur's report to the UN human rights council. This is despite the poorest half of the world's population causing just 10% of

<u>carbon dioxide emissions</u>. Of the five million deaths globally every year due to temperature variability, <u>the majority take place in the Global South</u>. Research shows that <u>more than 90% of pollution-related deaths occur in low-income and middle-income</u> countries.

As the joint report by Greenpeace UK and Runnymede Trust puts it:

"It has become clear that if we want to meaningfully tackle the environmental emergency we have to address the racism to which it is so inherently linked."

Even in the rich, developed and more equipped nations of the Global North, the impact of climate change is starkly different across class and racial lines, as abundant research and evidence attest. In the U.S., "wildfire vulnerability is spread unequally across race and ethnicity", with majority black, Hispanic or Native American districts facing 50% greater vulnerability compared with other groups, a study found.

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Black, Asian, and minority-ethnic Londoners are more likely to be affected by the impact of the climate crisis, a 2022 study by the Mayor of London's office found. In the U.K. at large, "working-class communities are significantly more likely to be flooded, and have less money and insurance to weather the storms," according to The Guardian article. "In the U.K., People of colour; those living in areas of high deprivation; marginalised groups such as refugees and asylum seekers; disabled people; and those experiencing homelessness; are all more vulnerable to health problems related to climate change," said Greenpeace and Runnymede Trust.

A 2015 Oxfam report titled "Extreme Carbon Inequality" found that the world's richest 10% of people cause 50% of emissions, with this group claiming over half of the world's wealth and living in the so-called "developed" nations. Besides, <u>right now</u>, <u>millionaires</u> alone are on track to burn 72 percent of the remaining carbon budget to keep the planet under 1.5°C of warming, according to Jason Hickel.

This is while "the poorest are hit first, and hit hardest, affecting food supply, forcing starvation, depleting water supplies, destroying homes and creating climate refugees, to name but a few of the impacts", as pointed out by a Friends of the Earth EWNI report.

A 2021 report by UNICEF said that all the 33 countries it identified as 'extremely high-risk' - to the effects of climate change - collectively emit *just 9 per cent of global CO2 emissions*. This is while *the 10 highest emitting countries collectively account for nearly 70 per cent of global emissions* - and only *one of these countries* is ranked as 'extremely high-risk'.

It would be a good time to remember the words of activist Chico Mendes, who said:

"Environmentalism without class struggle is just gardening."

A climate movement that doesn't also address the systemic racism that it's inextricably linked to is akin to white-washing the movement. A climate movement that doesn't factor in the ways in which race, class, gender, caste etc. intersect and interact to compound the impact of climate change on people along these different social categories, fails to achieve long-lasting impact. It also risks perpetuating the same systemic forces of racism and colonialism that led us to this situation.

<u>Greenpeace USA explains</u> how the fight for climate justice entails a fight for racial justice, too, when it said:

"White supremacy is a thread that directly ties the Buffalo shootings (a racist hate crime that took place in New York), police brutality, and fossil fuel racism. We cannot have an honest or productive discussion about saving the environment without confronting the role of White supremacy in destroying it."

In response to some of their supporters' question of "Why can't you stick to the environment?", <u>Greenpace USA said:</u>

"Clean air is the most basic of rights—and many minority communities don't have it. That didn't happen by accident. The destruction of both the environment and human rights has been intentional; racism and the environment are inextricably linked.

Black, Brown, and Indigenous peoples have suffered at the hands of White colonizers for centuries through genocide, devastation of food sources, intentional poisoning of their water, and carcinogens from plants placed in low-income minority neighborhoods. These attacks continue because they are made by people with money and power against people without means to fight back. There is no separating the environment from the racism that has harmed it."



7. Climate colonialism

The lack of intersectionality and a justice focus in addressing the climate crisis also comes with the risk of bringing about and exacerbating climate apartheid, a phenomenon that a report from a UN human rights expert described as one where the rich pay to escape heat and hunger caused by the escalating climate crisis while the rest of the world suffers. There's also the interlinked risk of climate colonialism, which refers to the exploitation of resources of the Global South by Global North nations for their green agendas. As the University of Oxford puts it:

"Under the veil of 'development projects' and 'carbon offsetting', Western countries and companies can continue to pollute as normal, which disproportionately affects BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, People of Color] folk in both developed and developing countries."

Examples of this are abound. A stark <u>example of 'waste colonialism'</u>, which refers to the practice of wealthier countries shipping their trash to lower income countries to avoid accountability, is that of how the U.K., Germany and other wealthy countries are big exporters of plastic—"<u>much of which lies rotting in ports in Turkey, Vietnam and other countries," as this article in The Guardian explains.</u> "The ugly underbelly of recycling in the Global North" is how the article aptly refers to the situation.

Paradoxically, some of the countries credited to be the world's top recyclers are also the largest plastic waste exporters. While Germany was named the world's top recycler by the World Economic Forum in 2017, it exports an average of 1 million tonnes of plastic waste annually, more than any other EU country. The U.K. exports over 60 per cent of its plastic waste, too.

Gündoğdu. Sedat Gündoğdu, a plastics pollution researcher in Turkey, <u>describes this</u> <u>phenomenon in the same article in The Guardian:</u>

"When you continue to consume more plastic there are only two ways to tackle the waste. One is incineration, the second is dumping. If you don't have dumping in your country then you should incinerate. But this has a carbon footprint, and many countries trying to cut carbon emissions don't want to incinerate their own waste.

Some of the top waste producers in Europe, like the U.K., France and Germany have to find ways to deal with this issue. And the way they've found is exporting to poorer countries without effective waste management systems or environmental legislation and regulations. This is waste colonialism."



<u>Similarly, a 2019 Guardian investigation</u> found that hundreds of thousands of tons of U.S. plastic are "being shipped every year to poorly regulated developing countries around the globe for the dirty, labour-intensive process of recycling".

Israel state and corporate actors, too, unsurprisingly, use greenwashing discourse emphasising "environmental innovations" to distract from land dispossession and settler violence. Such "innovations" and discourses work to ensure ongoing settler occupation while severing Palestinian relationships to and on land, this research by Sara Salazar Hughesfound et al found.

Vijaya Ramachandran, the director for energy and development at the Breakthrough Institute, captures this phenomenon <u>here when she wrote:</u>

"Pursuing climate ambitions on the backs of the poorest people in the world is not just hypocritical — it is immoral, unjust, and green colonialism at its worst."

A Friends of the Earth EWNI report illuminates another interlinked phenomenon. While countries like India and China have polluting factories, they produce goods that are imported and consumed by countries like the U.K. and the U.S. — "so a lot of the time their pollution is, in fact, our pollution", it said.

<u>As Jason Hickel reminds us</u>, the nations of the Global North have "effectively colonised the atmospheric commons". They've enriched themselves as a result, but with devastating consequences for the rest of the world and for all of life on Earth, he added.

The saga of powerful nations scrambling to protect their own lives—and maintain the facade of being forerunners of green and sustainable agendas—by literally exporting and dumping the problem on people in poorer countries continues. There are so many ways in which systemic racism, racialised capitalism and colonisation are inextricably linked with environmental degradation and the climate crisis—so the solutions have to be intersectional, too. People from systemically marginalised and poorer communities cannot be rendered the collateral damage of the exploits of rich nations and left to fend for themselves over a crisis not of their making.

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8. Even as victims of climate change are disproportionately non-White, the climate movement remains overwhelmingly White

Multiple research and media sources affirm that the environmental movement has historically been "very white", "too middle class", "lacking in empathy for the least well-off in society", as well as "the privilege of the wealthy who don't need to worry about bread and butter issues". ¹⁷ This is paradoxical—and worrying—because the ramifications of climate change have been worst experienced by communities who are marginalised and from the Global South, and will continue to be borne by them.

As Greenpeace UK reminds us aptly, "Crucially, climate justice also means putting indigenous communities at the centre of this process. They have practised sustainable living for so long, and have resiliently protected 80% of global biodiversity."

Needless to say, the white-washing happening in the climate movement is not only in terms of how the climate crisis is talked about and addressed, but in terms of representation, too. "The green movement remains overwhelmingly white," is how a news article described the results of a U.S.-based report by Green 2.0, released in 2021, focusing on 40 of the largest nonprofit environmental organisations.

Several organisations have owned up to this and vowed to do better. Notably, in 2020, the Sierra Club, one of the U.S.' historical environmental organisations, <u>renounced the racist beliefs and actions of its founder</u>, John Muir, and said it's redesigning its "leadership structure so that Black, Indigenous, and other leaders of colour at the Sierra Club make up the majority of the team making top-level organisational decisions". "We know that

¹⁷

https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/environmental-movement-very-white-these-leaders-want-change-that

https://theconversation.com/climate-change-is-too-middle-class-heres-how-to-fix-that-123231 https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/oct/08/the-history-of-the-climate-movement-is-very-white-how-youth-campaigners-took-on-a-mining-giant-and-won https://edition.cnn.com/2019/11/24/uk/extinction-rebellion-environment-diversity-gbr-intl/index.html

the systems of power that got us here will not enable the transformational change we need," the statement from its executive director further stated.

"Many groups in the U.K. – including Greenpeace and others within the environmental sector – acknowledge they have not done enough to recognise the links between systemic racism and climate change," <u>admitted Greenpeace in this joint report with the Runnymede Trust in 2022</u>.

A 2023 report by Friends of the Earth EWNI. acknowledged the climate movement's lack of enough focus on climate justice and the root, systemic causes of climate change, when it said:

"Oppressive systems such as White supremacy, colonialism and the systematic dehumanisation of people of colour and Indigenous Peoples have facilitated this extractivism over the centuries and allowed for the continued destruction of the environment. Climate and environmental breakdown cannot be separated out from other struggles for equality and racial justice.

The climate and environmental "mainstream" movements haven't done a good enough job of reflecting this, and while some brilliant work is happening in communities, policy-making and other spaces are not inclusive ones. For this to change, people working in these areas must do better at actively combatting racism and being led by those on the frontlines of injustice."

9. How the climate movement decentered people and risked itself being out of touch

The answers to why the environmental movement failed to draw in the communities climate change actually disproportionately impacts can be found in evidence and research on how the movement presented itself over the past many decades—owing to the overarching factor of the lack of an intersectional and justice focus, as explained earlier.

For far too long, the climate movement and the narratives around it **did not centre people at large**, leave alone the systemically marginalised and disadvantaged people who are the worst impacted by climate change. <u>Greenpeace UK said in a 2022 article</u> that in the 1980s, "the mainstream eco movement narrowly focused on wilderness conservation and endangered animals – not people." It often silenced or ignored the voices of the communities most impacted by environmental issues, it added.

In a webinar presenting the *Framing Climate Justice* project's findings, which ran from 2019-2020, Mila Aliana, one of the many involved, said that owing to mainstream climate framing, the ideas/symbols/phrases/visuals that first come to people's minds when talking about climate change are: emission targets; individual behaviour changes; harm to non-human victims like polar bears, biodiversity loss and technological fixes.

"There has not been a lot of effort to communicate the role of exploitative systems; the historic responsibility for climate change; or the unequal impact on different groups of people around the world...," she said, adding that talking about climate justice can be hard as it brings together concepts that are not typically linked together in people's minds.

The project captures the disproportionate impact of climate change on systemically marginalised and disadvantaged people in a simple and powerful way when it said:

"And we can use sentiments like: 'we're weathering the same storm but not all of us are in the same boat' to illustrate the point that it's a universal phenomenon but with vastly unequal impacts."

Zamzam, a young activist from the Global South, is quoted <u>saying the following in this article by</u> Natalie Gil:

"For decades, our families and communities in the Global South have faced land exploitation and poisoning, toxic waste dumping and ecological disasters. While entire communities were facing catastrophe in the '80s from climate catastrophes, [the wider environmental movement] chose to focus on penguins, polar bears and fluffy animals, thereby sending the clear message that they did not care about these communities."



"Activists erred badly a decade ago in making the polar bear and its melting arctic home the symbol of global warming, which conveyed the message that this isn't a threat right here, right now (or soon)," science journalist Sharon Begley writes eloquently in this 2015 article.

She <u>quoted Andrew Leiserowitz</u>, director of the Yale Project on Climate Change Communications, as saying:

"When it's about polar bears or Pacific islands sinking sometime in the future, it seems too psychologically distant to care about. People might know global warming exists and wish someone would do something about it, but they don't have an inexhaustible capacity for worry".

"They have to focus their concern first on immediate worries—things like feeding their kids and holding a job and getting from Point A to Point B alive," Begley summed up.

Closer to home, Uplift in Ireland had similar findings in its resource *Building public support for climate solutions: A Narrative Guide* where it said that "most people care about climate

change but don't relate to the wider conversations they are hearing." One of the greatest achievements of those responsible for global heating is that much of the discussion is abstract, avoids identifying who is responsible and overly focuses on individual actions, it added.

10. Colonial power structures still intact—the West's historical responsibility for climate change extends beyond the loss and damage fund

To come back to the topic of Israel's ongoing atrocities in Palestine, it's almost as if the innocent lives snuffed out don't matter—that they have never, in fact, mattered. Is it because of entrenched Western propaganda-fuelled Islamophobia that has put in place hostility towards Arab people? Deep-rooted media bias and propaganda, particularly in the wake of 9/11, that has unconsciously poisoned people's subconscious to believe that they are inherently violent people that need to be civilised by Western colonisers? After all, <u>Islamophobia constitutes one of the most acceptable forms of bigotry in the West today.</u>

It's hard to believe in the face of all that's happening that the underlying core colonial mindset that deems certain people—especially people of colour/Muslims/people in Global South countries—inferior and less worthier than their White counterparts, has all been abolished.

This is clearly playing out in Palestine as their lives continue to be snuffed out while most of the Western world continue to find creative ways to absolve and justify the horrors they face. Never again, they said, but it's happening—yet again, right now.



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This is clearly playing out in Palestine as their lives continue to be snuffed out while most of the Western world continue to find creative ways to absolve and justify the horrors they face. Never again, they said, but it's happening—yet again, right now.

"It has to be recognised and accepted that systematic racism does not just exist, it is flourishing, and that global environmental justice will never be achieved unless systemic racism is challenged head on," said Greenpeace in this joint report with the Runnymede Trust.

"Responsibility and action for tackling environmental breakdown must be accepted by the Global North," it averred.

On a similar note, as long as the systemic racism, colonialism and extractivism Israel is inflicting on Palestine continue to flourish, global environmental justice will never be achieved— and the countries in the Global North need to step up.

That it is high-emitting countries like the U.S. and European countries that bear the brunt of responsibility for climate damages was addressed, in some small way, at COP28, with the establishment of a "loss and damage" fund to help compensate countries for climate impacts not

of their making. While it remains to be seen if and how the fund will serve to achieve climate justice - especially given that civil society organisations have already pointed out shortcomings¹⁸ - this paper's reference to the loss and damage fund is solely in terms of **the tenets of historical responsibility and accountability of rich, powerful (and polluting) nations regarding the climate crisis**, which was formally acknowledged for the first time with the establishment of the fund.

Now, as Palestinians suffer the climate impact not of their making, but due to over half a century of Israel's settler colonialism—that have killed people, contaminated their water, ruined and appropriated their natural resources and turned their hospitals and educational institutions to rubble—shouldn't Western nations use their power and leverage to pull out all the stops to curb this violence? Shouldn't the former colonisers in the West, in particular, have the moral obligation to stop Israel's ongoing atrocities and settler colonialism?

As important as the tenet of historical responsibility is in the loss and damage funds, the historical responsibility of Western nations *to not enable the root causes of climate change to play out in Palestine is significant, too*. It is the Western nations' colonial and extractivist endeavours that resulted in them bearing disproportionate responsibility for the climate crisis in the first place. So it is every bit their responsibility to stop the same colonial and extractivist forces from wreaking lives in Palestine.

A call for a ceasefire in Palestine is just bare minimum—Israel needs to be tried and punished for its mass murder of innocent civilians and children, its multiple flagrant war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law, as well as for its blatant disregard for human rights and democracy. Not just for the current atrocities, but for what they have been doing, amid the settler colonialism model they've put in place, for the past many decades. We need sanctions against Israel, including a military embargo, an end to economic links, and the cutting of diplomatic ties, similar to the sanctions that were imposed against apartheid South Africa.

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¹⁸ Trocaire; Oxfam



The loss and damage funds shouldn't be the only avenue to absolve Western nations of their historical responsibility when it comes to climate change. Countries in the Global North also need to take leadership and responsibility to avert the ramifications of decades-long settler colonialism and extractivism—the root causes of climate change—playing out right now in Palestine, ruining lives. Their leadership and responsibility need to extend to pulling out all the stops to stop a genocide that is stemming from decades of colonisation and racialised capitalism—a model they set in place to begin with. Not to mention this is also a genocide that is the result of decades of inaction - and even support and funding - by powerful Western nations.

This also ties in with the European Union's first formal attempt to push reparations for slavery and colonialism on the EU agenda a few months ago, where it said the EU should urgently address and reverse the lasting impacts of European colonialism and support a reparations programme to rectify continuing injustices. The 2022 joint report by Greenpeace and the Runnymede Trust also stated there is a "need for swift reparation, mainly from European countries and the U.S., towards South American, African and Asian countries, because of the history of colonisation and exploitation, which have left many of these regions in a state of vulnerability".

After all, as Friends of the Earth Europe explains here, European economies were built in great part through the colonisation of the Global South, extracting and depleting resources and appropriating human bodies and labour. "This exploitative and unjust situation still exists today through neocolonialism."

<u>As The Conversation wrote</u> in response to the IPCC mentioning colonialism as the driver of climate change in 2022,

"By connecting climate change to colonialism in this summary, the IPCC is sending a message to the governments and policymakers of the world that **addressing the effects of climate change**

cannot be achieved without also addressing the legacies of colonialism. It's a message that also acknowledges how the climate justice movement has long campaigned for the recognition of the unequal effects of climate change on different groups of people."

11. Mainstreaming intersectionality and a system-change focus—demystifying and growing the climate movement

Not only are systemically marginalised communities continuing to disproportionately pay the price for the climate crisis—a crisis which is largely a making of the rich and privileged—they are also weighed down with multiple, intersecting crises caused by the same oppressive systems that are at the root of the climate crisis.

This brings us to yet another, interlinked consequence to the climate movement not mainstreaming intersectionality and a justice-focussed approach in it—it failed to tie the climate crisis to the so-called 'bread and butter issues'.



Climate change is a hugely unjust, racist and oppressive crisis that has been allowed to ravage the world with impunity due to colonial, exploitative and White supremacist systems. So it needs to be tackled, too, with approaches and solutions that are intersectional, centre justice, human rights as well as the real lived experiences of people at its core.

There's an acute need for a system change focussed, nuanced approach that, in addition to focussing on root causes and centering justice, also makes the inextricable links with other intersecting crises—that perhaps manifest more starkly as everyday, daily emergencies—

and fight the same oppressive, exploitative systems that are at the root of all these intersecting crises.

By embedding intersectionality in every part of the climate movement—and mainstreaming it—there is an explicit connection drawn between the climate crisis and the everyday, daily emergencies beleaguering people. It brings in awareness that climate change is not some distant amorphous possibility that our future generation will be left with, that the implications of it are already borne by real people and their lived experiences—especially those grappling with daily inequalities and emergencies.

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For people who are beleaguered by multiple, overlapping crises, and are grappling to make it from one day to the next due to poverty, institutionalised racism, crippling inequalities etc., they seldom can afford the luxury of being anxious about the future as well. Or worry about melting glaciers, fluffy polar bears or even nature at large. When their everyday lives are riddled with unfathomable tragedies and their future is *already* bleak with uncertainties, how can we expect them to care about the climate and nature in some mystical, amorphous sense?

The answer lies in framing and addressing climate change in a way that connects these different crises and shows that it's the same oppressive systems that are responsible for these interlinked crises—and that fighting climate change means fighting these exploitative systems that are riddling their everyday lives with multiple dangers, too. It means putting people, justice and human rights at the centre and forefront of the climate movement. It means explaining how the fight for climate justice would mean fighting for gender justice, racial justice and migrant justice, too.



With an intersectional approach, we are able to tell people (especially those who currently feel alienated from the movement)—actually, what you are fighting for - maybe for a roof over your head - can be achieved by what we are fighting for, too. Addressing the climate crisis through a justice/system change/intersectional/human rights angle means you're tackling the root systemic causes of deep-rooted and exploitative economic systems that prioritise profits over people—which are responsible for the issues that are consuming people's daily lives, too, such as the housing crisis, the cost of living crisis, inequalities, poverty, unemployment etc.

This would empower the vulnerable and marginalised communities who are disproportionately bearing the brunt of climate change to join the climate movement—especially as the movement currently doesn't represent their voices enough. It would draw them in, especially those most impacted, because *they will find their immediate, daily struggles and issues reflected in the movement.*

Fighting the oppressive systems responsible for intersecting crises would be more impactful than fighting 'climate change' in some abstract sense— which is also affirmed by <u>Uplift research</u> in Ireland. This research advises against "presenting climate change in abstract terms". Instead, Uplift stresses the importance of showing that climate change is being driven by the activities of corporate and political power.

It's long overdue that as a climate movement, we need to make more evident and known the ways in which these multiple crises intersect with each other, and the root, systemic causes for all these crises being the same.

Closer home in Ireland, whenever the climate movement advocates for climate action to be a top agenda of the government, it is oftentimes met with disgruntled responses from people who point at the crippling housing crisis in the country. Provide homes for people first and then worry about the climate, they say—and understandably so. But with an intersectional and system-change focussed approach, we are able to tell people that *climate action means* challenging the same exploitative systems and policies that have resulted in the housing crisis. That climate action means alleviating the cost-of-living crisis and the housing crisis, too (this will be explored in more detail in section 12). That climate action doesn't in fact mean overlooking the real, lived experiences of people and the crisis they face — that "there is no necessary contradiction between ecological and social objectives." Addressing climate change and an issue like the housing crisis doesn't have to be mutually exclusive, though the general perception, unfortunately, seems to be that this is indeed the case.

Author and activist Naomi Klein <u>explains this well in this interview with Natalie Hanman in The Guardian</u>, while talking about her book *On Fire: The Burning Case for a Green New Deal*, where she said that "the way we talk about climate change is too compartmentalised, too siloed from the other crises we face". She speaks of the **need for an approach that links climate** change to the "so-called bread and butter issues: how are we going to get better paid jobs, affordable housing, a way for people to take care of their families?"

<u>In another interview with Madeleine de Trenqualye in The Guardian</u>, on the future of climate justice, Klein said:

"What if we responded to these unveilings (multiple crises) with an intersectional response that actually tried to change the system that was producing these overlapping crises?... We have multiple emergencies here in British Columbia that are costing many lives, whether it's a heat dome that kills 600 people, or a toxic drug supply. What we're trying to understand is how are they feeding each other and how are they intersecting with each other?"

Such a system change focussed approach that centres justice will help demystify the movement and *make its relevance known to those communities disproportionately impacted*. It would help make it clear that climate change is a multiplier of existing inequalities and forms of social disadvantages. Mainstreaming intersectionality would ensure that the masses actually know that

when a ramification of climate change strikes, it's always those who are already grappling with a housing crisis, poverty or institutionalised racism who will be hit first—and the hardest.

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The resultant impact of all of the above would be demystifying climate change and making it known to the masses that **fighting the climate crisis is** *indeed* **a matter of fighting for the bread and butter issues,** and that it's far from being a "rich person's issue". It would also steer the climate discussion away from the hallowed halls of policy experts, environmentalists, scientists and other niche circles, into the everyday lived, complex realities of ordinary people.

Naomi Klein describes the fight for climate justice as multitasking, and also explains the benefits of such a justice-focussed and intersectional approach in the same 2023 interview in The Guardian:

"We live in a time of multiple overlapping crises: we have a health emergency; we have a housing emergency; we have an inequality emergency; we have a racial injustice emergency; and we have a climate emergency, so we're not going to get anywhere if we try to address them one at a time. We need responses that are truly intersectional. So how about as we decarbonise and create a less polluted world, we also build a much fairer society on multiple fronts?"

Many environmentalists hear that and think: "Well, that sounds a lot harder than just implementing a carbon tax or switching to green energy." And the argument we make in the climate justice movement is that what we're trying to do is to build a power base that is invested in climate action. Because if you're only talking about carbon, then anybody who has a more daily emergency – whether it's police violence, gender violence or housing precarity – is going to think: "That's a rich person problem. I'm focused on the daily emergency of staying alive." But if you can connect the issues and show how climate action can create better jobs and redress gaping inequalities, and lower stress levels, then you start getting people's attention and you build a broader constituency that is invested in getting climate policies passed."

Such an approach would also be beneficial to growing the movement, as it would combine the synergies and powers of global movements on multiple, intersecting issues. The benefits of such a system change focussed approach in interlinking multiple crises and growing the movement is also needed to bring about the scale of change that is needed. The combined people power and movement power would be indispensable in our fight against climate change.

"... The fact that for so many people it's so much more comfortable to talk about our own personal consumption, than to talk about systemic change, is a product of neoliberalism, that we have been trained to see ourselves as consumers first...Because we've been trained to think very small," Naomi Klein reminds us in this 2019 interview.



We really need to train ourselves to think much larger, and mobilise and build the people power needed to make the climate movement a mass movement which would be capable of driving the changes we need fast enough and fairly enough.

As Friends of the Earth Ireland said,

"Like the movements that made slavery illegal, secured the vote for women or basic rights for many workers, **now more than ever it will need to be a global movement.** The indigenous peoples resisting land grabs and pipelines, the communities resisting fracking, the students campaigning for divestment, and the school strikers protesting for their future, have all begun to show us what that looks like. Our job now is to help build our movement's power fast enough to bring about the system change needed, and to ensure no one is left behind."

12. What a system change approach and intersectional climate movement look like and how it will address the 'bread and butter' issues

In this section, I am primarily drawing on the <u>work of Jason Hickel</u>¹⁹ to explain what a system change focussed approach looks like, especially when it comes to combating the climate crisis, and how it will address the so-called bread and butter issues that will be pivotal to growing the climate movement.

12.1 What a system change approach fundamentally looks like



https://www.jasonhickel.org/blog/2023/3/18/universal-public-services
https://monthlyreview.org/2023/09/01/the-double-objective-of-democratic-ecosocialism/
https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2590332223005079
https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921800923002318https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(23)00174-2/fulltext

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140673623009194

As Jason Hickel explains, it's necessary to analyse and resolve the ecological crisis while simultaneously analysing and resolving the social crisis in the same stroke. Attempting to address one without the other **leaves fundamental contradictions entrenched**, he said.

"There is no necessary contradiction between ecological and social objectives. The two can and must be pursued together."

In order to achieve well-being for all—while at the same time reducing aggregate use of energy and materials to decarbonise—it's important that we "distinguish between the socially necessary production that clearly needs to increase for social progress, and the destructive and less-necessary forms of production that urgently need to be scaled down", he explains further. In other words, this means addressing the fundamental and deep-entrenched economic systems rooted in extractivism and exploitation.

What would such an economy look like? This means expanding and decommodifying universal and essential public services in health care, education, public transit, child care, energy, water, nutritious food etc., he explains.

12.2 How climate action helps address bread and butter issues



Hickel explains that this is core to not only achieving ecologically necessary objectives, but also alleviating unemployment and economic insecurity; as well as ensuring the well-being of all—whilst also 'de-linking' well-being from growth. It also means scaling down—in a just and fair way—socially less-necessary forms of production such as fossil fuels, weapons, airlines etc., whilst extending product lifespans and banning planned obsolescence, Hickel further states.

In fact, as Hickel explains, one of the central insights emerging from research on degrowth and climate mitigation is that "universal public services are crucial to a just and effective transition". Evidence and research are abundant to also affirm how universal public services in health care, education, public transit etc. will be pivotal to address the bread and butter issues or those issues that manifest more as daily, unavoidable emergencies in people's lives. Public services, Hickel explains, are a powerful driver of improvements in life expectancy, well-being, and other key social indicators.²⁰

What is more, Hickel explains that universal services would also <u>end the current</u> <u>cost-of-living crisis</u>, by directly reducing the cost of living. Public control over provisioning systems makes it easier to achieve rapid decarbonisation in those sectors, he adds.

What this clearly illuminates is the fact that climate action means taking action to address inequalities and meet basic human needs/rights, too. Unfortunately, this is not as self-evident and understood as it should be.

In all our communications and narratives around climate change, it's vital that we draw on the above to convey how a system change approach to climate change also means addressing other intersecting crises like poverty, inequality, housing crisis etc.

What this clearly illuminates is the fact that climate action means taking action to address inequalities and meet basic human needs/rights, too. Unfortunately, this is not as self-evident and understood as it should be.

These ideas are also endorsed by many organisations and scholars, and also specifically in the Irish context. Rory Hearne, a leading expert on the Irish housing crisis, draws on similar points in his book 'Gaffs: Why No One Can Get a House and What We Can Do About It'. He

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953616305858?ref=pdf_download&fr=RR-2&rr=7205e6398be411b7

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953606000621

²⁰ https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25150379/

emphasises how we must tackle the climate and housing crises together, and that there are ways to do the same.

"Housing can make a major contribution to achieving a genuinely socially just transition, where people, particularly those struggling financially and most affected by the housing crisis, experience an improvement in their quality of life, while also addressing the climate crisis. If people see an improvement in their own homes, there will be greater public support for climate measures"

He notes that at the moment, "too much of the climate movement ignores social issues and inequalities such as the housing crisis", while also describing the "political danger" of people suffering from the housing and cost of living crisis being "convinced by right-wing climate sceptics that the climate issue will be a massive unnecessary burden on them, and it's all a conspiracy of the elite".

"Solving the housing crisis must be at the heart of climate action, and it will also help lift people out of poverty and reduce widening generational and social class inequalities...Addressing climate change while at the same time solving the housing crisis, reversing growing inequality and strengthening social cohesion is a profoundly powerful and radical idea. This is a vision for a new green and equal Ireland (and hopefully across the world too)."

<u>Friends of the Earth Europe said:</u> "Publicly-led and owned solutions can lead the way in solving our ecological crisis, whereas market-based and private solutions fail to do this." Universal Basic Services or the free public provision of infrastructures and services in areas such as water, waste, education, healthcare, housing and transport, <u>it explains</u>, are "the most effective way to ensure basic needs are met and human rights are enforced". "They are also a powerful tool for wealth redistribution, and inequality and poverty reduction. Low income, marginalised people and women would benefit in particular."

Greenpeace, in its joint report with the Runnymede Trust, said:

"The fight for environmental justice will not only help to tackle the climate crisis and biodiversity loss; it can also help to bring about the transformation of our economies, safeguard jobs and livelihoods, and fight inequality,"

12.3 "It's time for revolutionary change"



However, for these changes to happen, "mild reformism", that "tweaks around the edges of a failing system" will not work—it's time for revolutionary change, Hickel reminds us. This means and entails strongly tackling the oppressive systems head-on that are responsible for multiple, intersecting crises.

Hickel said:

"This is a time for revolutionary change. It is clear, however, that the environmentalist movement that has mobilised over the past several years cannot serve as the sole agent of this change. While the movement has succeeded in bringing ecological problems to the forefront of public discourse, it lacks the structural analysis and political leverage to achieve the necessary transition. The bourgeois green parties are particularly egregious, with their dangerous inattention to the question of working-class livelihoods, social policy, and imperialist dynamics. To overcome these limitations, it is urgently important for environmentalists to build alliances with the unions, the labor movements, and other working-class political formations that have much more political leverage, including the power of the strike."

Supporting and defending anticolonial social movements in the Global South is also important in this process, he said. <u>Hickel further explained that</u> these policies of universal public services; job guarantee; ensuring strong democratic governance of public systems.; as well as the de-linking of human well-being from the requirement of ever-increasing aggregate production; should be the *core demands of a united climate and labour movement*. This further reinforces this paper's

argument for a system change focussed approach that makes the inextricable links with other intersecting crises/movements.

"Universal services, a job guarantee, living wages, a shorter working week — these are popular interventions that could provide the basis for mass political support. ... for the climate movement, which is often accused of ignoring the material conditions of working-class communities, this approach addresses real bread-and-butter needs and creates cause for alliances with working-class formations. This is the political movement we need."

Hearne echoes similar sentiments in his book *Gaffs*, which draws on the Irish housing crisis. He notes that the climate response and policy discussion is dominated by a focus on individual change. "...it misses the large-scale fundamental and structural systems that have to be changed, such as in housing. And it ignores the one hundred largest multinational corporations...and lifestyles of the millionaires and billionaires who produce 70 per cent of all emissions," he said.

"But to address the climate and housing crisis together, we need to get radical. We need to be visionary and take transformative action...we have to reconstruct our values and our economies and societies with a new vision and purpose – one based on ensuring that everyone has their basic needs met in a way that enables planetary survival. One that ensures that everyone's human rights are met. This has to be the driving principle of our economies – not profit maximisation, shareholder stock value, wealth or property values."

Prominent climate justice activist Asad Rehman also points at the need to make the links between the climate movement and other intersecting crises, in this <u>interview with Matthew Taylor in The Guardian:</u>

"Winning on the climate is never going to be possible with environmentalists alone; we need to build social licence for the change that is needed and that means bringing in other movements – the labour movement, people working on economic justice and poverty, you have to bring in the energy of Black Lives Matter, migrant rights groups."

Rehman also points at the importance of such a system-focussed approach. He argues that "fossil fuels and the logic of extraction and exploitation are woven into the fabric of the economic order and therefore to tackle emissions you need to address the system of capitalism that creates them and other crises simultaneously, putting "justice and equity" at the heart of the campaign".

"It's key to make the climate crisis relevant to the lives of ordinary people – about warm homes, free public transport and clean air – and to build solidarity, "he said.



12.4 "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere"

In conclusion, to bring it back to what is happening in Palestine, we can't combat climate change whilst a genocide unfolds with impunity in Palestine. Israel's current massacre in Palestine points to the need to have intersectionality, justice and human rights embedded across the climate movement. Or else, a movement that purportedly exists to save humanity will unwittingly not do *enough* (whilst also self-righteously and ignorantly believing that it's doing all it can to 'reduce polluting emissions' and 'save the planet'- some of the favourite catchphrases), as a genocidal government destroys people and the planet.

We can't combat climate change whilst a genocide unfolds with impunity in Palestine.

What Israel is doing in Palestine currently also portends what could further unfold with impunity in the future: new thresholds for ways in which powerful nations can exploit and oppress the systematically marginalised—whilst also being absolved of these acts. There's no separating the climate movement from Israel's massacre in Palestine. It's not a mere afterthought or perfunctory act of standing in solidarity or supporting a separate cause—the deliberate and systematic maiming of people and nature, as well as egregious manifestations of colonialism and racialised capitalism, is every bit an endeavour of the climate movement.

Civil rights activists Fannie Lou Hamer and Martin Luther King's following quotes capture the intrinsic interconnectedness of humanity's fight for human rights and justice across the globe:

Fannie Lou Hamer: "Nobody's free until everybody's free."

Martin Luther King Jr: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

Nine months into a genocide, when not even the United Nations' highest court terming this a plausible genocide and ordering Israel to stop its massacre has managed to alleviate the plight of Palestinians, it feels fitting to end by drawing on <u>Palestinian journalist Plestia Alaqad's inspirational words:</u>

"We live in a world where you get killed because you're Palestinian. We live in a world where you get suspended for saying don't kill children. Nine months into a genocide, you might ask yourself, will my protest change the world? When in fact, you are protesting in order for the world to not change your heart. We may not have the power to change the world but we have the power to not let the world change us."