

## **Defending Our Environment: Ecocide and Apartheid in Palestine and at Home**

By Viwe Mazwana

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On Monday, 4 August 2025, Khanya College staff held a discussion at the Workers Museum Cottages titled 'Defending Our Environment: Ecocide and Apartheid in Palestine and at Home.' The guest speaker was Abeer Butmeh, a Palestinian Environmental Engineer, Water Activist, and Coordinator of the Palestinian Environmental NGO Network.

The discussion focused on the devastation caused by Israel's ongoing war on the environment in Palestine. Butmeh described how Gaza's land, water, and air are being poisoned, especially through bombing from the ongoing war. The bombing has also destroyed the seed banks that will have a lasting impact on the Palestinian trees and plants, and this strips away generations of agricultural knowledge, Palestinian heritage, and the right to grow plants and survive.

Butmeh explained that even before the war escalated after 7 October 2023, Gaza's soil and water were already heavily polluted. Israel's government has made it impossible for Palestinians to access their farming land, especially in the southern regions, which have been evacuated and closed off.

Now, Gaza is facing total collapse. Water reservoirs have been bombed. Health systems are broken. During the ceasefires, there were no services, no toilets, no waste removal, no water trucks, nothing", Butmeh said. This has created a public health disaster, and the long-term effects of chemical contamination will harm people's health for years to come. Some effects are irreversible.

Abeer also pointed out that Israel is using water and food as weapons. By cutting off water and destroying agricultural tools, they are forcing people from their homes and making survival difficult. "This is not a mistake, Israel knows exactly what it is doing". Palestinian farmers cannot farm. Seeds cannot grow. Movement is restricted.

Abeer reminded us of the resilience of Palestinians. Their fight to protect their land and survive is something that should inspire all of us.

The discussion made strong connections between Gaza and South Africa. In South Africa, many communities still suffer from water apartheid, where water is only available to the elites, and others are forced to buy or go without. Public services are neglected, land is not accessible to ordinary people, and basic service is not delivered to the working class.

The bombing of seed banks in Gaza reminds us that land and life are connected. In both Palestine and South Africa, people are being denied the right to live with dignity. The struggle of the Palestinian people is also our struggle: for land, for clean water, for justice, and for freedom.

As Abeer said, "We live in a critical period". We need concrete solutions to save both the people and the land. The Palestinian courage and dedication to resistance must be recognised and supported around the world.

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