

Dear Fellow Activists,

I am writing to share with you my vision as a first generation American of Palestinian decent and as a member of the human race who is passionate about the sanctity of the environment all life forms share.

My name, Ruba, is Arabic for “Green Hills.” This seems appropriate, as I have been in love with nature and wildlife for as long as I can remember. As a child, rather than play inside with dolls or watching television, I was rolling on the ground outside, playing with mud and observing wildlife. I was convinced that I could understand animals. Pets and wildlife alike needed only to look at me and I understood what they were saying. As I’ve come to know the human spirit, I have realized that nature, wildlife and mankind share a common interest: To Live.

My fascination with life is the root of my personal philosophy: That which supports and sustains Life, is good. That which destroys and degrades Life, is bad.

As I’ve come to discover my philosophy on life, I have also grown to accept that my Being is inherently political. As a human being, I believe in human rights and justice for all people of the globe. As a Palestinian, my belief is surrounded with political debate.

While the discussion on the conflict between Israel and Palestine can go on endlessly, there is an undeniable truth that is often overlooked and yet serves as the foundation from which all other issues have derived: Palestinians have been forced to lose their homes and their land for the sake of a system that believes only one religious group has any right to this land.

All this discussion is to say that I have often found myself at a crossroads, fighting myself for the “right” path. Shall I continue to service my love for nature and continue to study and work towards the protection of the Earth’s ecosystems, or shall I continue speaking as a Palestinian and devote my energy to the promotion of the requisite justice

from which a true peace can be founded? Recently, I have realized that I do not have to make this distinction.

Palestinians face injustice on a number of levels stemming from the external forces of Israel and the United States and from internal forces, their “representative” government that is so heavily related to the oppressive powers of the aforementioned powers. However, as I’ve clarified before, the root cause for all conflicts that have evolved over the last 56 years between the Palestinian people and the state of Israel is the loss of land – the environment.

In the actions that lead to the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Palestinians, a farming and agricultural people, were forced, if not threatened, to leave their native lands. Since the establishment of the state of Israel, Palestinians, including refugees and those who became citizens of Israel, as well as native Bedouin tribes of historic Palestine, have been increasingly marginalized and have suffered from numerous human rights violations. These people have suffered from the creation of a Jewish-only state. They are denied clean water, their crops are uprooted if not sprayed with toxins and their surrounding waters and environment, controlled by Israel and effected by military activity, face a loss of biodiversity.

As a Palestinian, my family has itself endured the devastations of occupation and environmental degradation that has occurred by the manifestation of the Zionist state. My father’s family is from a small farming town by the name of, “el Mazra’a,” which literally means, “the farm”. My great-grandfather had a large piece of land, full of fruit and olive trees, which provided the family with their livelihood. Before the creation of the state of Israel, during the increasingly popular terrorist attacks by Zionist groups seeking a Jewish State, my great grandfather and his family were forced at gunpoint to leave their home. They were driven out of all of their land, integrity and opportunity. Ironically enough, after the creation of Israel, my grandfather was given a short-term job working a small part of that land for its new Zionist owners. Without substance for their business, the family was left deprived and at the mercy of the political upheaval behind Israel’s creation.

My mother hails from a small town in the outskirts of Jerusalem. Her grandfather had a similar experience to that of my father's. In recent years, as Israel pursued the development of infrastructure to ease the commute for Israeli settlers in the occupied territories to Israel proper, a new form of human suffocation materialized. Jews-only highways and roads were established, some immediately overhead the homes of Palestinians inside Israel's borders. In the case of my relatives, these highways serve as the view outside their window. De-beautification is one issue in this situation; the other, an objective concern, is the undeniable and negative environmental and health affects of this infrastructure.

I am driven to pursue the human injustice and the natural degradation that follows the opportunistic and unethical strategies taken on by Israel and its Zionist regime. In my studies, I've learned of numerous endangered species and a multitude of unlawful acts that threaten the environment and the humanity of the region. After fifty-six years of dispossession, the occupation of Palestinian land continues, further destroying the viability of communities as well as the nature of the region.

The occupation is manifested in many forms. My personal stories are only mere indications of the environmental implications involved with the ongoing oppression of Israel upon the Palestinians. While Walls continue to rise, homes are demolished and settlements established, the humanity of all peoples in the region, as well as the environment, is not only deprived, but is exploited by the Israeli political powers as a means to continue marginalizing the Palestinian people.

I propose two primary modes through which to approach these concerns, the first of which is education. This reality must be revealed and recognized by the public. While valuable reports and assessments that describe issues including biodiversity and the illegal destruction and confiscation of land and crops do exist, the current political arena is unlikely to act on them without public pressure.

Secondly and concurrently, efforts must be put towards involving the international community and environmental interest groups. Groups such as the Sierra Club have been known for their interests in human rights and the environment and may prove valuable in lobbying for US political support against the environmental deprivations caused by Israel. Along with other NGOs such as the World Wildlife Fund and Conservation International, environmental advocacy groups can help in educating people, building collaborative and international support for the sake of biodiversity and the protection of the environment. Groups like Earth Justice, on the other hand, can provide legal support for the enforcement of the numerous international laws relevant to these environmental implications.

Furthermore, Israel has recently declared its interest in joining the European Union. This appeal, though unlikely to prove fruitful for mere geographic concerns, also places the European Union in a position to declare that Israel's violations of international law render the state an unacceptable member of the Union.

Regardless of a nation's position on the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, the loss of biodiversity and the environmental degradation that is caused by the state of Israel is of global interest. We, as members of the international community, must take this opportunity to speak against the environmental deprivation that Israel causes through its system of discrimination and occupation.

I thank you for your interest and hope that you will find value in this cause for justice.

Sincerely,

Ruba Marshood

Bio:

Ruba is a 24-year old graduate student at Duke University where she is studying environmental management at the Nicholas School of Earth and Ocean Sciences and international development policy with the Sanford School of Public Policy. She is an advocate for peace and justice for humanity and for nature. As a member of human rights

organizations and environmental interest groups, Ruba hopes that her efforts to protect the environment will prove a successful catalyst for social justice.