

Environmental Oppression in the West Bank: Is Europe Complicit?

Article by Alessandro Stefanelli, Filippo Taglieri

June 23, 2026

The Nitzanei Shalom industrial settlement in the occupied West Bank has long caused health and environmental harm to Palestinians in Tulkarm. A new investigation reveals that Europe maintains commercial ties with factories operating in the area and their parent companies, despite the settlement's illegality under international law.

Rima Ali and her husband, Yusuf, have been living in their house, in the south-western part of Tulkarm in the occupied West Bank, for over 20 years. Some 100 metres away sits Nitzanei Shalom ("Buds of Peace"), an illegal Israeli industrial settlement. Rima says the factories with their foul odours, dust, and pollution have caused her health problems, such as coughs and headaches.

"We don't feel comfortable sitting in the courtyard because of the smells and noises coming from the factories, so I prefer to stay indoors," she explained. "If I hadn't built my house before they built the factories, I wouldn't have stayed here," Yusuf added.

The couple's daily struggle is part of a wider environmental and public health crisis affecting the citizens of Tulkarm, particularly in the southwestern and western neighbourhoods. Aside from the pollution, residents have also witnessed major fires in the industrial zone that caused heavy clouds of smoke, forcing some families to temporarily evacuate their homes.

Adeeb Awad, 63, a resident of Irtah, south of Tulkarm, lives just 20 metres away from the industrial zone. "Whenever a fire breaks out, I have to evacuate the house with my family. It's suffocating and almost life-threatening," he said.

Industrial relocation

The Nitzanei Shalom industrial zone was established in the 1980s, when Israeli companies specialising in waste and plastic recycling, cement, and chemical production were gradually relocated from Israel to the Tulkarm area, forming a cluster of 13 factories.

A prominent entity in this industrial hub was Geshuri Industries, a large agrochemical company manufacturing pesticides and fertilisers. The company moved to its current site in 1982, relocating from Tel Mond.

The relocation followed intense legal disputes and community protests in Israel over environmental violations and public health risks, as reported in a 1999 document of the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. The factory owners contend the move was motivated by a need for additional space and "various security problems" regarding the workers. However, former member of the Knesset Issam Makhoul claimed that legal action against the factory for its negative impact on public health effectively halted its operations at the original site, prompting its owners to relocate to a zone where safety and environmental standards could be bypassed.



Palestinian workers leaving the Nitzanei Shalom complex at the end of their shift. Tulkarm, West Bank, Palestine. ©Alessandro Stefanelli

Nitzanei Shalom is located in Area C. With the 1995 Oslo II Accord, the West Bank was divided into Area A, where the Palestinian Authority (PA) had full control, Area B, which fell under Palestinian civil administration and Israeli security control, and Area C, comprising about 61 per cent of the land, which was placed under full Israeli control. The division was supposed to be temporary, with full control of all three areas “gradually transferred to Palestinian jurisdiction”. However, the transfer has never occurred.

Israel’s abusive policies and practices against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank have intensified since 7 October 2023, with government officials openly encouraging and supporting settler attacks, as reported by [Amnesty International](#).



Oday, 36, walks through his field, with the Green Line separation wall behind him. Tulkarm, West Bank, Palestine. ©Alessandro Stefanelli

His land sits between the separation wall and the perimeter wall of the industrial complex. Since October 7, 2023, he has been banned from accessing it, as the entire area was declared a closed military zone. The construction of the factories reduced his land by a third—confiscated under military orders.

Tulkarem, West Bank, Palestine

Sacrifice zone

According to testimonies we gathered from residents, workers, and farmers in the Tulkarm area, the presence of the industrial complex has affected every aspect of their lives. Fayez Taneeb, a 66-year-old farmer from Irtah, owns agricultural land surrounded by factories on two sides and the separation wall built by Israel on another.

Taneeb says the wastewater from the factories flowing onto his land forced him to dig a canal to mitigate the damage. “Our intervention was intended to reduce, though not entirely eliminate, these harms by directing the water through a controlled channel,” he said.

He claims that dust emitted by the factories has also damaged his crops, both outside and inside greenhouses. “When the dust from the factory settles on my greenhouses, it sticks like cement to the plastic, blocking the sunlight,” Taneeb said. “The plants inside cannot grow or survive without sunlight.”

Moreover, the civil defence service in Tulkarm documented five major fire incidents in the industrial zone between 2009 and 2022. Eyewitness accounts and civil defence described heavy black smoke forming in the area, with fumes and toxic gases lasting for days.



Farmers Oday, 36, and his mother Mona, 62, stand in front of one of their greenhouses, its plastic sheeting almost completely destroyed. Behind them rise the silos of the Nitzanei Shalom industrial complex. Tulkarm, West Bank, Palestine. ©Alessandro Stefanelli

As Walid al-Zabda, director of civil defence operations in the Tulkarm Governorate, explained, it is difficult to determine the causes of the fires without permission to enter the zone. “Our role was limited to securing the sites near the industrial area to prevent the fires from spreading to the Palestinian lands located outside the factory’s boundaries.”

Al-Zabda also notes that the Palestinian side had submitted requests to enter the industrial zone and provide assistance during the fires, but those requests were rejected by the Israeli authorities. He added, “The problem was not the fire itself but the black smoke. Even the civil defence crews who went out to secure the site could not bear the smells.”



Fayez Taneeb, a 66-year-old farmer from Irtah, shows his chest X-ray, which indicates signs of lung damage. According to doctors, he has reduced pulmonary capacity and can no longer work his farmland next to the Nitzanei Shalom industrial complex due to air pollution in the area. Tulkarm, West Bank, Palestine. ©Alessandro Stefanelli

In a roundtable interview we conducted with former Palestinian workers at the Yamit factory, which specialised in water treatment and the production of water filters until its closure in 2023, they confirmed that factories in the industrial zone, including Yamit, regularly burned waste materials. Ahmed Al Masri, who worked in the factory for 29 years, said that at Yamit, defective paint products were often burnt in an open yard within the factory borders. He added, “The burning occurred about two to three times per week.”

Satellite images document the expansion of the industrial zone and a decline in green spaces over the years. Agricultural activity, once fundamental to the city’s livelihood, is now limited. This decline accelerated in the 1980s with the creation of the industrial zone, and again after 2003, following the construction of the separation wall. Taneeb claims that Israeli forces confiscated almost 16 dunums (3.6 acres) of his land for the construction of the wall and the industrial zone. Between 2013 and 2021, much of the remaining green space in the area was sacrificed to accommodate new production facilities.

Environmental contamination caused by the factory’s liquid waste is also visible from satellites. Images from 2023 and 2024 show residues and whitish sludge, likely originating from the industrial area, along the drains that cross the crops.



Oday, 36, a Palestinian farmer, shows white industrial discharge flowing through his agricultural field, just beyond the perimeter wall of the chemical factories. The runoff seeps directly into the soil; the white colour is likely caused by industrial waste products discharged from the factories. Tulkarm, West Bank, Palestine. ©Alessandro Stefanelli

Environmental oppression

In recent years, the industrial zone has been dominated by three main operators: Prima Ciment (now owned by Cement IS, previously by Geshuri); Tal El, which focuses on waste treatment; and Margal (formerly Pelegas), a manufacturer of gas tanks for vehicles.

In 2013, the Civil Administration – the Israeli military body governing the occupied West Bank – approved a plan to expand the industrial zone despite formal objections submitted by the Israeli human rights organisation Bimkom – Planners for Planning Rights on behalf of the Tulkarm Municipality and local residents. Diana Mardi, a field researcher at Bimkom, says the plan “significantly expanded what could be built, allowing structures to increase from two storeys to six”.

Mardi also explains that the plan has clear gaps in the environmental assessment file. “It’s not just an expansion of the industrial zone, it’s a way of legitimising dangerous and illegal structures.” She adds that the plan doesn’t take into account the industrial zone’s close proximity to residential areas in Tulkarm, as well as unresolved jurisdictional concerns.

Murad al-Madani, legal advisor at the Palestinian Environment Quality Authority (EQA), explained that Israeli factory owners find the West Bank a much easier place for establishing industrial facilities compared to Israel. This is largely because they are not subject to the same legal restrictions, particularly in terms of environmental standards, licensing, and taxation. “To this day, Israel does not recognise the Palestinian Environmental Law issued in 1999; instead, Israeli authorities apply the regulations they deem applicable in the West Bank,” Al Madani said.

The law Al Madani refers to defines “environmental nuisance” as “the harm or material damage caused by the generation of noise, vibration, radiation, or irritations; the release of smells which result from any activity of humans, facilities, transportation facilities or any other agent in a manner that affects properties or the human life.”

Article 25 of the law states that “the Ministry [of Environmental Affairs] shall, in cooperation with the specialised agencies,

work on establishing standards, instructions and conditions to reduce environmental nuisance generated by different activities; in addition, every facility owner, entity or individual shall be forbidden to cause any nuisance to the others.”

Because Israel does not recognise this law, Rima Ali and other residents of Tulkarm are denied the opportunity to exercise their environmental rights. Rima says that the nuisance she and her family face is not limited to odours and dust, but also includes the noise of industrial machinery. “The factory hardly ever stops working; it operates in two shifts, day and night,” Rima said. She noted that “the noise of the machinery is more disturbing at night, especially as the neighbourhood is quiet.”

The relevant Palestinian authorities haven’t done much to stop environmental oppression caused by the industrial settlement, for example by exercising their power to monitor or investigate environmental incidents caused by it.

On this matter, the governor of Tulkarm, Abdullah Kamil, said: “The Governorate has repeatedly called on the Israeli side to relocate these factories, given the risks they pose to the lives of Palestinians. It has also called for the establishment of an impartial international committee to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the area, covering the soil, water and air.”

He added, “The Governorate would abide by the findings of any report issued by this committee.” However, he explained that even if such a committee concluded that there were no adverse effects resulting from the industrial zone, “this would not deny the fact that these lands belong to the Palestinians.”

Documenting pollution

Palestinian researchers have struggled to document the environmental and health impacts resulting from the industrial zone, particularly with regard to collecting samples from the surrounding areas, due to the access restrictions imposed by Israel.

To understand these impacts, we interviewed experts specialised in this field, including Basel Natsheh, associate professor in the Environmental and Sustainable Agriculture Department at Palestine Technical University – Kadoorie, who published a [study](#) in 2016 on the impact of Gishuri factories on soil pollution in Tulkarm, and Safaa Hamdan, agricultural engineer and researcher at the same university.

Natsheh and Hamdan explained that studies provide evidence that environmental degradation affects soil, groundwater, air quality, and plant diversity, and poses potential health risks for nearby residents. However, they noted that many of these studies focus on individual environmental components rather than integrated environmental assessments. A notable exception is a 2015 study by the EQA, which used “an integrated approach, combining environmental sampling, laboratory analysis, biological monitoring, and social surveys, allowing evaluation of pollution pathways from the environment to human exposure.”

Nicola D’Alessandro, an associate professor at the University “G. D’Annunzio” Chieti-Pescara in Italy and an expert in green chemistry and environmental catalysis, observed that “the number of detailed and accurate scientific reports on the West Bank area is scarce, and the few studies that are available were produced a long time ago.”

D’Alessandro also highlighted the presence of persistent pollutants like dioxins, which are industrial by-products known to “cause serious health effects, including cancer, endocrine disruption, immune system damage, and developmental problems”. He emphasised that investigating reports of toxic substance discharges from the factories in Nitzanei Shalom “requires careful data collection that takes into account the most common environmental indicators: from basic air and water tests to more detailed measurements regarding the presence of parasites, metals, and dioxins.”

Looking ahead, Natsheh and Hamdan warned that “the environmental situation in Tulkarm may worsen if current pollution sources continue without effective mitigation.”



Palestinian farmers work in their field beside the Nitzanei Shalom industrial complex. Their crops grow in the shadow of factories emitting white particulate matter into the area. Tulkarm, West Bank, Palestine. ©Alessandro Stefanelli

Is Europe complicit?

Nitzanei Shalom has maintained commercial ties with companies across Europe, raising questions about the extent to which Europeans are complicit, directly or indirectly, in perpetuating forms of social and environmental injustice against the Palestinians.

The companies owned by the Geshuri family are one example. Products from Prima Cement – which the family later sold to Cement IS, while continuing to manage it – were distributed in Spain, as [reported](#) in 2017 by the Observatory on Human Rights and Business in the Mediterranean.

These relations also involved Pelegas, now Margal, which [sold](#) its gas tanks for military land and naval vehicles to countries including Brazil, Georgia, Turkey, and Romania. It should be noted that, until 2020, Pelegas was included on the United Nations' list of companies operating in the occupied territories.

Moreover, Prima Cement produces blended gypsum for [Orbond and Tambour](#), which together account for 80 per cent of Israel's domestic gypsum market. Orbond was founded in Israel in 1993 and, five years later, became part of Knauf, a German multinational manufacturing building materials. Knauf is active within Eurogypsum – a European federation of national associations representing the gypsum production and processing sector in Brussels. Between [April 2024](#) and [April 2026](#), Knauf's Christoph Dorn held the presidency of the federation.

In June 2026, in response to a request for comment from The New Arab, Knauf did not deny its relationship with Orbond, but pointed out that Orbond's products are not exported to Europe.

A Knauf spokesperson wrote to The New Arab: "We are committed to ethical, legally correct and socially responsible business management. We expect our suppliers to share this commitment and to make reasonable efforts to promote the compliance of their own suppliers and subcontractors with the principles laid down in our Code of Conduct for Suppliers."

Cement and gypsum (which is used in the production of cement to retard its setting time) are imported to Nitzanei Shalom from abroad, specifically from Greece – through the Greek subsidiary of the Holcim Group – and Turkey. In 2022, Israel Shipyards and Cement IS acquired the Turkish company [Onat Pan](#), which specialises in the export of gypsum, according to media sources. However, the deterioration in trade relations between Israel and Turkey forced Cement IS to start importing from Egypt as well.

Tambour, the other company supplied by Prima Ciment, is a paint producer registered in Israel and owned by the Singaporean holding Kusto Group. In 2019, Tambour acquired the Italian paint company [Colorificio Zetagi](#), which in turn bought 80 per cent of [Verinlegno](#) in 2024.

These developments suggest that European companies continue to maintain commercial ties with factories in Nitzanei Shalom and their parent companies, despite the settlement’s illegality under international law and its negative social and environmental impacts.

Benedetta Scuderi, a Green member of the European Parliament from Italy, observed that the International Court of Justice has made clear in 2024 that the Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories violate the Fourth Geneva Convention, and therefore all UN Member States should abstain from any aid or assistance that helps maintain Israel’s presence in the territory. “That clearly includes trading with companies based in the settlements, which exploit and pollute stolen Palestinian land,” the MEP explained.

Scuderi, who was detained by Israel in 2025 while participating in the Global Sumud Flotilla, explained that although national trade bans are possible, they are “ineffective” because goods can circulate freely in the EU customs union. “We are now urging the European Commission to put forward a legislative proposal that could finally implement a ban on all trade relations with illegal Israeli settlements,” she said.

In March 2026, responding to our request for comment, a European Commission spokesperson explained that “The European Union adopts a firm position of not recognising Israeli sovereignty over the territories it has occupied since June 1967, in line with international law.”

The editorial team at The New Arab contributed to this investigation. [Altreconomia](#), [Irpi Media](#), [New Lines Magazine](#), and [The New Arab](#) co-published with the Green European Journal edited versions of this investigation. This investigation was developed with the support of [Journalismfund Europe](#).



Journalismfund Europe



Alessandro Stefanelli is a photojournalist, documentary photographer, and reporter working at the intersection of visual journalism, field reporting, and investigative research. He focuses on conflict, migration, and environmental challenges, with a strong emphasis on long-form investigations. His works have been published by *The Atlantic*, *Libération*, *La Stampa*, *Le Soir*, *La Repubblica*, and *Il Manifesto*, among others.

Filippo Taglieri is a freelance journalist with a strong interest in investigative journalism. For many years, he has been writing about multinationals in the fossil fuel sector and global trade in Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean, and Latin America. He has spent a long time researching extractivism and energy in Latin America and Italy, and agriculture in Italy, Palestine, and Mexico.

Published June 23, 2026

Article in English

Published in the *Green European Journal*

Downloaded from <https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/environmental-oppression-west-bank-is-europe-complicit/>

The Green European Journal offers analysis on current affairs, political ecology and the struggle for an alternative Europe. In print and online, the journal works to create an inclusive, multilingual and independent media space.

Sign up to the newsletter to receive our monthly Editor's Picks.