



# Society for Conservation Biology

## Statement on Middle East Conflict

*Second Draft, with member feedback incorporated*

During the ICCB 2025 conference, an emergent theme was the need to understand the complex social-ecological systems in which conservation resides and that to combat biodiversity loss the intersections (or polycrisis) of biodiversity, climate change, food (in)security, and (armed) conflict must be considered. We recognise that injustices persist globally that fundamentally intersect with conservation, including in the ongoing conflict in Israel and Palestine. We acknowledge the continued displacement of Palestinian communities, including traditional knowledge holders, through escalating military violence impacting all who reside in the region. This conflict has caused profound human suffering and environmental destruction across the region over the past 20 months. The repeated bombings in Israel and Palestine<sup>1</sup>, along with the use of white phosphorus and other destructive weapons, have not only taken countless human lives but also damaged vital ecosystems. Citrus<sup>2</sup> (laymoun and bordaan) and ancient olive (zeitun) trees – central to Palestinian cultural and agricultural life – have been destroyed, severing communities from their food sovereignty and deep-rooted ecological relationships<sup>3</sup>. The intense bombardments of Gaza and Israel, the increased military activity across the Middle East, and other wars worldwide have further significantly accelerated carbon emissions, stressing the destructive impact of war on our climate<sup>4</sup>. We acknowledge this to emphasize that conservation must include all voices and that many impacted by this war and other global crises were unable to join us at ICCB to have their voices heard. We call for peace based on mutual respect and security for all, advocating for an immediate end to all fighting in Gaza (and all other parts of the Middle East) from all sides, and promoting reconciliation and collaboration.

As a conservation community it is our responsibility to address these conflicts by facilitating conversations of peace and equality. We seek to do our part in this by taking a new path. We have invited a small set of those who engaged in the submission period and identified those who wish to engage in a respectful and facilitated conversation to

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<sup>1</sup> Qumiyeh, M.B. (2024) Impact of the Israeli military activities on the environment. *International Journal of Environmental Studies*, 81(2): 977-992 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207233.2024.2323365>

<sup>2</sup> Kabha, M. and Karlinsky, N. (2021) *The Lost Orchard: The Palestinian-Arab Citrus Industry, 1850-1950*. Syracuse University Press. ISBN 9780815636809

<sup>3</sup> Braverman, I. (2009) Uprooting Identities: The Regulation of Olive Trees in the Occupied West Bank. *PoLAR*, 32(2): 237-264. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1555-2934.2009.01061.x>

<sup>4</sup>

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/jan/09/emission-from-war-military-gaza-ukraine-climate-change>



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begin a new discussion. The intent is to write a collaborative scientific statement or editorial) on shared (and unique) environmental problems in the Middle East region as a

whole, with war as one aspect and many others in scope. When it is robust it would be shared again more widely for others to comment on and sign on to.

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## Process in Statement Drafting

**Member request:** Attendees asked SCB/ICCB to acknowledge the Gaza war's humanitarian–biodiversity dimensions.

**Initial review:** SCB leaders met and confirmed our usual policy path (draft → board/policy review → member input → endorsement).

**Timing adjustment:** Given limited time during the congress, the draft was presented at plenary for awareness (not as a final conference statement), and a two-week member comment period was opened.

**Parallel statements:** We coordinated timing with other statements (e.g., Oceania, Indigenous) to ensure each received appropriate visibility and due process.

**Member feedback & revision:** After two weeks, we received diverse feedback. A revised draft and a summary of how comments were addressed were produced.

**Next steps:** We will host a small, facilitated dialogue with invited contributors (including Palestinian and Israeli scientists) to refine shared principles and consider an editorial for broader review and potential endorsement/signatures.

**Our commitment:** Transparency, inclusivity, and careful process. We'll update members on outcomes and any call for signatures.

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## Additional readings:

Amir S, Rechtman O. 2006. The development of forest policy in Israel in the 20th century: implications for the future. *Forest Policy and Economics* 8:35-51.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1389934104000838>

Liphschitz, N., & Biger, G. (2001). Past distribution of Aleppo pine (*Pinus halepensis*) in the mountains of Israel (Palestine). *The Holocene*, 11(4), 427-436.

<https://doi.org/10.1191/095968301678302869>

Levine, H. (2005), Mediating the War of Olives and Pines: Consensus-Based Land-Use Planning in a Multicultural Setting. *Negotiation Journal*, 21: 29-69.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1571-9979.2005.00046.x>

Liat Berdugo, "A Situation: A Tree in Palestine," *Places Journal*, January 2020. Accessed at:

<https://doi.org/10.22269/200107>

Kabha, M. and Karlinsky, N. (2021) *The Lost Orchard: The Palestinian-Arab Citrus Industry, 1850-1950*. Syracuse University Press. ISBN 9780815636809

Nazzari, R. (2019) Reflections: The Olive Tree and the Palestinian Struggle against Settler-Colonialism. *A Journal of Canadian Literary and Cultural Studies*, 8: 87-93

<http://dx.doi.org/10.33776/candb.v8i0.3679>

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Irus Braverman, Planting the Promised Landscape: Zionism, Nature, and Resistance in Israel/Palestine, 49 *Nat. Resources J.* 317 (2009). Available at:

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/00207233.2024.2323365>

<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/186/186-20240719-adv-01-00-en.pdf>

<https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-176121/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/30/carbon-footprint-of-israels-war-on-gaza-exceeds-that-of-many-entire-countries>