Photo of the Day | A break from studying



A student plays ping-pong in the McMahon game room on Feb. 10, 2026. The game room was available for people to hang out and relax throughout the day.
PHOTO BY NORA MARIANO, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

Don't mistake Israel's genocide as environmentalism

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Since its founding in 1948, Israel has made environmentalism a key part of its international messaging. Its government, alongside the Jewish National Fund (JNF), an international Zionist non-profit closely aligned with Israel's government, has planted millions of trees across the nation and its surrounding lands in an effort to "make the desert bloom." They proudly claim their efforts are tied to the intrinsic wellness of the world, creating and fueling afforestation efforts to make a happier, healthier and more environmentally conscious state. These claims are largely false, however, and instead represent only the bold print of a propaganda poster. Peeling away the scenic greenery and picturesque framing reveals a systemic history of carefully calculated exploitation masked behind a facade of charity. This is not goldhearted, green-thumbed environmentalism, but instead territorial consolidation and economic harm packaged inside an oppressive system which bears remarkable resemblance to the settler colonialism that dominated the Americas across the 16th and 17th centuries.

But what does Israel have to say on the matter? A quick look at their public messaging reveals a glorification of their forestation efforts. Working closely alongside the JNF, Israel's government claims they are building parks for recreation and tourism; urban forests and woodlands for improved air quality; creating a system that controls heat and fosters biodiversity. The JNF prides themselves as a world leader in managing open areas and forests in semi-arid and arid regions, where they work to combat desertification through their implementation of forest systems. What's more, they claim to value land conservation, a call back to our own land trusts here in New England, where they work in close partnership with farmers to develop sustained agriculture. This sounds incredible — after all, we all imagine planting trees to be a good thing.

Yet, somehow, these efforts have only hurt the environment. Why is that? Shouldn't fighting desertification be a good thing? The trick of the matter is where Israel is planting their trees. Across Palestine, where war now rages, afforestation efforts — where trees are planted in arid regions to combat the spread of desertification, where dry regions are degraded into desert-like terrain as a result of climate change and anthropogenic causes — have been underway since the early 1960s. Israel claims this is land development — and yet much of Palestine is not a desert. Though a semi-arid dry region does stretch across the southern half of the region, Palestine is naturally a mediterranean climate, a semi-rare biome centered around low shrubs and seasonal rainfall: far from an empty land of windswept dunes. When Israel bulldozes over this rich land to replace it with their own trees, they are destroying a critical ecosystem, full of unique and complex flora and fauna that have defined the people of Palestine since time immemorial. Most notably, the native olive tree, an important producer in the region's ecosystem and a crucial crop for local farmers, has suffered large losses at the hands of Israel. The Israeli Defense Force (IDF), Israel's military arm, has actually sought out these trees by clearing and uprooting over 1 million of Gaza's estimated 1.1 million trees.

This has not only impacted the ability for Palestinians to sell their products on the global stage, plunging them into deeper economic instability, but has also severely hobbled the natural ecosystem of the land. Worse, the trees subsequently planted by Israel, often supported by the IDF, are an invasive species. Eucalyptus trees, native to Australia, release toxins that prevent other plant life from growing in their presence, crippling native biodiversity. These trees also require incredible amounts of water compared to Palestine's native species, serving to exacerbate an already drought stricken region. In fact, scientists have already shown that the major cause of desertification in Gaza is not a lack of trees — but rather the Israeli occupation that has led to 75% of Palestinian fields undergoing desertification due to scorched-earth tactics.

So why is Israel, and the JNF, doing all of this? Why are they pouring so much money into an environmental effort that only harms the environment? The truth of the matter is that their environmentalism does serve a purpose — as an offensive, oppressive weapon against a native population. Their planting of invasive Eucalyptus trees in an effort to mirror an idealistic European idea of a forest not only withholds economic autonomy from Palestinians but is also used to prevent their return in war-torn areas.

The Nakba genocide, Arabic for "the catastrophe," refers to the violent, ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people at the hands of Israel, where over 500 towns and their populaces were destroyed by the IDF and other local Israeli militias. Nearly 75% of the native populations were then evicted by settlers, backed by the state of Israel. In the aftermath of this horrific tragedy, the ruins of these former native villages were repurposed in one of two ways. Some were claimed by Israel, given new names and new residents. Others faced an unusual fate: they were planted over with trees, becoming parks managed by Israel. The consequences of this were subtle, but severe: now managed by a foreign state, the millions of refugees from the Nakba had no land to return to. Even if they did make the pilgrimage home, they would find an alien world awaiting them: a strange forest of uniform trees, a long call from the olive trees and low shrubbery they had lived among for countless generations. This practice of afforestation to claim territory has continued even today, further chipping away at Palestinian borders and identity.

We must not believe the lie that a desert is being painted green — the story only mirrors the "terra nullius" narrative of empty land that was used by early American settlers to justify the genocide and removal of Indigenous populations. If we are to truly seek a greener world, it must be one where change actually matters — and not as a hostile strong arm for the dispossession of innocents. After all, a greener world must be one built for the benefit of all, not just the few.



Palestinian residents look on during an operation by Israeli authorities to demolish properties built in Silwan neigborhood located in the East Jerusalem, near the Old City, Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2026.

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