

# THE THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES CLIMATE CHANGE POSES FOR ISRAEL

The August 2021 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report made plain that we are well on the way to rendering this planet unlivable for humans.

Global warming caused by our activity “is already accelerating sea-level rise, shrinking ice and worsening extremes such as heatwaves, droughts, floods and storms. Tropical cyclones are getting stronger and wetter, while Arctic sea ice is dwindling in the summer and permafrost is thawing. All of these trends will get worse... As the planet warms, places will get hit more not just by extreme weather but by multiple climate disasters that occur simultaneously... Some harm from climate change — dwindling ice sheets, rising sea levels and changes in the oceans as they lose oxygen and become more acidic — is irreversible for centuries to millennia.”

We are already seeing the impact of this in Israel. In August 2021, a massive wildfire that rampaged through the Jerusalem Hills burnt down 3,700 acres of natural and planted woodland and open spaces. It will take decades for these unique ecosystems to truly recover. The birds and animals that were lucky enough to escape the flames have lost their habitat, and will be forced to seek food and shelter in severely reduced environs.



Before and after Jerusalem's forest fires

(Photo credits: Dudi Keidar and Orli Binyamin-Kurtzband)

Though Israel is far from a major player on climate matters, it can still do its part to help tackle the crisis. As with any problem requiring innovative and often technological solutions, steps by the enterprising country could ripple out to have far greater effects across the globe.

### WHAT CAN ISRAEL DO TO REDUCE ITS OWN EMISSIONS?

Yoav Yair, Dean of the School  
of Sustainability at the  
Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya  
(IDC)

1. Replace electricity that comes from fossil fuels with renewable energy and plant more trees to absorb carbon dioxide. In 2018, 70% of electricity came from natural gas, and only 4% from renewables.
2. Rethink Transport by subsidizing the purchase of electric cars and moving far more quickly toward public transportation that runs on electricity. Israel should consider penalizing those who still want to run their vehicles on diesel through a congestion tax (as proposed in the 2021 budget), and eventually, also on those using gas.
3. Local agriculture needs to be strengthened — not only to cut emissions of carbon dioxide during transport of produce from overseas, but also to ensure a store of nutritious food (the more local, the better) and food security in the event of disruptions to the world economy.

### HOW CAN ISRAEL HELP THE WORLD REDUCE EMISSIONS?

Foreign ministry director Alon  
Ushpiz

Israeli experience and knowledge can help countries around the world in the fields of:

- water technologies
- seawater desalination
- drought-resistant agriculture
- renewable energies and energy storage
- development of animal protein substitutes
- reforestation

From a narrow Middle Eastern and Israeli perspective, this is a drought-hit region where water shortages are worsening. And were it not for former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's strategic focus on building desalination plants less than two decades ago, Israel right now would be facing an intolerable water situation.

Israel can also advance "climate diplomacy," which includes attending international events on climate issues

4. Enhance quality of advanced computer equipment that is necessary to generate Israel-specific climate predictions.

5. Go Vegetarian - A move from meat to **protein alternatives** is essential in the fight against climate change. Worldwide, the livestock industry is responsible for 14.5% of all human-caused global warming gases, with cattle responsible for more than half of that.

Israel's own meat industry is relatively small, but Israelis are among the largest per capita consumers of beef on the planet, with calves and lambs shipped from as far away as Australia in huge ships powered by crude oil, which also contribute to high pollution levels in the port cities of Haifa and Ashdod.

and promoting Israeli technologies that offer solutions.

The country's know-how on water and farming tech has been cited as a major driver for countries establishing ties with the Jewish state. In June, the UAE and Tel Aviv University announced they would be setting up a joint water research institute.

Last month, Israeli startup Watergen, which has developed a technology to produce water from air, installed a generator in Arizona to help the Navajo Nation deal with a crippling drought there.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did hearing the summary of the latest IPCC report make you feel as a young person in this world?
2. Of the five suggestions made by Yoav Yair to help Israel reduce its emissions, which do you think should be made a priority right now?
3. The Israeli Foreign Ministry called the IPCC report "a warning light," but noted that international cooperation and the pooling of knowledge could prevent the "extreme scenarios" predicted, with Israel leading the way. What role would you like to see Israel take on the global stage in the fight against climate change?

4. Israel Environment Minister, Tamar Zandberg, very much supports a Carbon Tax<sup>1</sup> in the hope that this will lead every Israeli to use less electricity in their day to day lives. What do you think of this idea?

*Translation:* Carbon has a price, and we will soon start charging it. Israel is joining most of the OECD countries, and will start levying a carbon tax, reflecting the real cost of carbon emissions - air pollution and the climate crisis. I insisted on introducing this measure in the founding guidelines of the government, and it will soon take effect. Israel is stepping up in the fight against the climate crisis.



5. During the horrific August 2021 Jerusalem fires, The Palestinian Authority sent four firefighting teams comprising 21 people to assist Israeli first responders. Lt. Col. Nael Azza, a spokesperson for the Palestinian Civil Defense, said it was the fourth time in recent years that Palestinian firefighters had joined with Israelis to respond to an evolving disaster.

Defense Minister Benny Gantz thanked Ramallah for sending the trucks, emphasizing that it was done at the PA's initiative. Israel had issued a request for international aid in fighting the fires from several countries. The PA was not on that list.

"I would like to thank Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas for his initiative to send firefighters to assist Israel today. Mutual aid and saving human lives are a common interest for us all," Gantz wrote on Twitter in Arabic.

1. From 2023 to 2028, a carbon tax will be applied, at slowly increasing levels, to coal, liquified petroleum gas, fuel oil, petrol and gas, in a move expected to cover about 80 percent of Israel's greenhouse gas emissions.

The tax will be limited, especially with relation to natural gas, to ensure that consumers — who will have to pay the tax — are protected from electricity price rises of no more than five percent during the period.

No additional carbon tax will be imposed on diesel used in transportation, because existing taxes on these fuels are already among the highest in the OECD, the statement said. However, the carbon tax element of the price will be made public.


Later on, the tax will be extended to emissions from other sources of global warming gases, such as garbage dumps, responsible for 8% of Israel's GHG emissions, and cooling gases used in air conditioning systems, refrigerators, and refrigerated vehicles, which account for 7% of GHG emissions.

Given that climate change poses a threat to both Palestinians and Israelis in what way could climate change be used as an opportunity to build greater trust across the Green line?

### Palestinian firefighters join the battle against Jerusalem flames

Lapid thanked Greece, Jordan and Cyprus, claiming Israel no longer needs international assistance. However, it appears Israel did accept the offer by the PA to send a number of firefighters.

By HADAS LABRISCH AUGUST 17, 2021 17:33



THE JERUSALEM POST

**Benny Gantz** - בני גנץ ✓  
@gantzbe

أريد أن أشكر رئيس السلطة الفلسطينية ، السيد محمود عباس ، على مبادرته بإرسال رجال إطفاء جاءوا لمساعدة إسرائيل اليوم ، فالتضامن المتبادل وإنقاذ الأرواح هما مصلحتان مشتركتان لنا جميعاً.

Translated from Arabic by Google

I want to thank the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, for his initiative to send firefighters who came to help Israel today. Mutual solidarity and saving lives are in the common interests of all of us.