

## **What Day Is Today?**

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Forty years after June 5, 1967, a variety of symposia, conferences and discussions are being held that stress the malignant effect of the occupation - on the Palestinians, of course, but also on morality, society, solidarity and politics in Israel. A few weeks ago, when those who have fond memories of 1967 tried to celebrate what they call "the reunification of Jerusalem," the result was a limp demonstration of nostalgic blasts on trumpets. It is good that this week, sane, critical voices are being heard. This will help many people to identify, in anger and anxiety, the depressing future that the occupation is passing down to us for years to come as well.

The struggle for memory and memorialization is important, because it never deals solely with the truth of the past. The things that we choose to remember and commemorate define our identity, bring it up to date and thus affect the shape of our future. Therefore, it is also important to think about the other significance of the date June 5 - the date on which World Environment Day is marked internationally.

On June 5, 1972, a commission comprised of representatives of many countries and leading scientists from the field of the environment and resource management convened in Stockholm. One outcome of the conference was the establishment of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), an organization that has since been behind the earth summits held in Rio de Janeiro and Johannesburg, navigated the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), steered the Kyoto process and advanced many environmental programs at the local level. In retrospect, it can be said that what started out as an elitist debating club and could well have resulted solely in the establishment of a bureaucratic mechanism for improving the quality of life in wealthy countries has instead become a key organization in humanity's current effort to define its strategy for survival.

The Stockholm conference also became famous because of the advertisement of the book *Limits to Growth*, edited by a number of the participants. As far back as 35 years ago, this book, which has been translated into dozens of languages and has become a milestone in the history of the international environmental movement, set a giant question mark over the story invented by the modern economy about the world that we consume. It challenges the economic

axiom that growth is dependent only on human intelligence, suitable technology and efficient organization, which implicitly assumes that the earth's resources are infinite and creates the illusion that it is possible to keep on growing forever.

Petroleum and coal have perhaps not run out since 1972, but some of the earth's resources are disappearing - the atmosphere, for one. There is still plenty of air to breathe, but what has been mortally damaged is the ability of the thin layer of air that envelops us to take in and purify the tremendous quantities of carbon and sulfur oxides that we cram into it. When the ability to absorb and purify has reached its limit, the excess emissions accumulate in the atmosphere, gradually creating a transparent, impervious sheet that traps the heat on the earth and brings about what is known as "global warming."

This climate change, and the destructive effects that it has already caused (chronic droughts and starvation in Africa, storms and diseases) and will yet cause (a shortage of drinking water for two billion people, a rise in the level of the oceans, tens of millions of environmental refugees), means that a new geopolitical era is already at the gates. If in past centuries wars sprang mainly from ethnic-territorial conflicts, in the current century, it is the environmental crisis that will, directly and indirectly, cause the corpses to pile up.

Conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will undoubtedly exist in the future as well. However, the context in which they will take place, and the extent of the international community's interest in neutralizing them, will be determined by the environmental crisis.

So what day is it today? Today, we commemorate two anniversaries. One reminds us that the wars of the past did not really have any victors. The other reminds us that the future of the human race will be assured only if human leaders worldwide, including in this country, are wise enough to halt the environmental-social crisis with a squeal of the brakes and change directions without delay.