

SOVEREIGNTY OVER NATURAL RESOURCES- WATER

Background

In 1967, Israel seized control of all water resources in the newly occupied territories. Israel retains exclusive control over all the water resources between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, except for a small section of the coastal aquifer in the Gaza Strip.

The 1995 Oslo II Agreement allocated Israel control of about 80% of water reserves in the West Bank. The Palestinian supply was limited to a predetermined annual amount of 118 million cubic metres from existing drillings, 70-80 million cubic metres from new drillings, and 31 million cubic meters sold by Israel to the Palestinians.

Expiration of Oslo II mandate

The Oslo II water agreement is still in effect despite the fact that it was originally designed to be a five-year arrangement. Since then, the Palestinian population in the West Bank has nearly doubled. Despite this, not only has the quota not increased, but in fact, the West Bank only receives about 75% of the agreed amount of water.¹ This means that the Palestinian Authority is forced to purchase water from Mekorot, the Israeli state-owned water company, in order to function. This creates a further element of control over Palestinian water supply.

The reason for this figure is partially due to technical difficulties such as the unexpected failure of new drillings in the eastern basin of the mountain aquifer. The other reason is due to obstacles introduced by Israel that restrict access to water.

Water Apartheid in the West Bank

Israelis, including settlers who live in the occupied West Bank, consume 247 litres of water per person on a daily basis. In contrast, Palestinians consume 82.4 litres, which is below the World Health Organization's recommended minimum amount of 100 litres.² In the West Bank, the gap in the water supply is estimated to be 33 million cubic metres per year.³

Due to restrictions from Israel, 92% of Palestinians in the West Bank are forced to store water in tanks on their rooftops to counter the chronic water shortage. Illegally transferred Israeli settlers face no restrictions and enjoy an abundance of water, well-irrigated farmlands, and access to swimming pools.⁴

Arbitrary military orders enable Israeli authorities to seize Palestinian land under the auspices that it is public land, such as nature reserves or military zones. This restricts access to water resources such as springs or wells on this land and no compensation or alternative water structures are provided.

¹ B'Tselem. (2021) [Water Crisis](#).

² Hareuveni, E. (2023) [Parched: Israel's policy of water deprivation in the West Bank](#). B'Tselem.

³ UNCTAD (2022) [Report on UNCTAD assistance to the Palestinian people: Developments in the economy of the Occupied Palestinian Territory Trade and Development Board](#). UNCTAD. TD/B/EX(72)/2.

⁴ Al Haq (2022) [New Report and film on Israel's Water Apartheid](#). Al Haq.

In Area C of the occupied West Bank, Israel controls and denies Palestinian access to water reservoirs and pumping sites and imposes a discriminatory and arbitrary permit regime to drill new water wells or repair existing ones. 70% of permit requests are rejected.⁵ Wells built without permits are routinely destroyed with bulldozers produced by complicit international corporations, such as Volvo, Hyundai and Caterpillar.⁶ The Israeli Civil Administration also pours concrete into wells used for irrigation and destroys piping.⁷

Another tactic used to deny access to water is preventing the Palestinian Authority from repairing infrastructure. Pipelines that run between Palestinian communities are often damaged, as are water grids within Palestinian cities and villages in the West Bank.

Rural-urban divide in the West Bank

Average consumption statistics do not give an adequate indication of the extent of water shortages for many Palestinians. Supply varies between different areas, and rural areas often have far less access to water than cities and more developed areas. Urban areas also have better road infrastructure which allows for the transporting of alternative water sources when Israel restricts the supply. For instance, springs and Palestinian drills can be used. In contrast, rural areas are more susceptible to restriction of water by Israel.

Gaza

Since 2007, Gaza has been under a blockade by Israel for any materials that can be deemed 'dual purpose'. This constitutes any materials that can be used for civilian or military purposes, including construction materials. This hinders the ability to repair water infrastructure, including those that were damaged in Operation Cast Lead in 2009 and Operation Protective Edge in 2014.

About 35.6 million cubic meters are lost on the way to homes due to Gaza's outdated and dilapidated infrastructure. Consequently, overall domestic consumption was 83.1 million cubic meters in 2018. There is an estimated annual 102 million cubic meter gap in the water supply in Gaza.⁸

UNICEF have reported that Gaza's water infrastructure is on the verge of collapse following the destruction of over 50% of facilities providing basic water and sanitation services. Displaced children in southern Rafah now have 1.5-2 litres of water per day, half of the 3-litre minimum threshold for survival and well below the 80 litres a day recommended by the World Health Organization.⁹ ¹⁰ UNICEF claims this will disproportionately impact children, who are more susceptible to diarrhoea, disease and malnutrition.

⁵ Al Haq (2023) [Water Apartheid and Corporate Complicity](#). YouTube.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ B'Tselem (2023) [Israel pours concrete into well and destroys irrigation system in the Palestinian village of al-Hijrah, south of Hebron](#).

⁸ UNCTAD (2022) [Report on UNCTAD assistance to the Palestinian people: Developments in the economy of the Occupied Palestinian Territory Trade and Development Board](#). UNCTAD. TD/B/EX(72)/2.

⁹ UNICEF (21 December 2023) [Barely a drop of safe water to drink in Gaza, UN aid agency warns](#).

¹⁰ Anera. (8 November 2023) [Gaza's Water Crisis Puts Thousands at Risk of Preventable Death](#).