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"Water apartheid" in the Occupied Palestinian Territories



Photo: ICC Jerusalem

**A dossier compiled for the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum
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Editorial

A December 2011 [report](#) by a French parliamentary committee calls Israel's allocation of water in the West Bank "apartheid". This report closely preceded the United Nations [release of data](#) showing that almost half of the West Bank is geographically off limits to Palestinians.

As a result, Israel keeps much of the West Bank's water off limits to Palestinians, too.

The French report edited by Jean Glavany, a member of parliament for the Socialist Party, states that "Some 450,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank use more water than the 2.3 million Palestinians that live there" and that "in times of drought, in contravention of international law, the settlers get priority for water."

The Oslo Accords of 1995 stipulated that, for the time being, both sides would maintain their resource utilization at the existing quantities. The Palestinian water consumption from the aquifer at the time was 118 million cubic metres per year, compared to 483 million for Israel, according to a [report](#) by the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA). Even though it was "originally intended to be applicable for a period of no more than 5 years," the PWA says that the same quota of 20 percent is "is still used by Israel as a ceiling to determine the amount of water it allocates to Palestinians". This amount of water is simply insufficient for the growing Palestinian population.

In this issue of Perspectives, PIEF points out that water is a highly politicized issue in the Middle East. You cannot separate water from politics anymore.

The dossier we have compiled contains a range of resources. We hope that this dossier will help readers to understand better the complexities and intricacies of final status solutions in the Palestine-Israel conflict and the role of water in this context.

In solidarity,
Ranjan Solomon

[Troubled waters - Palestinians denied fair access to water](#)

A report from Amnesty International from 2009 examined the main patterns and trends affecting access to water for Palestinians in the OPT. "Lack of access to adequate, safe, and clean water has been a longstanding problem for the Palestinian population of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT)," the introduction to the report begins. "Though exacerbated in recent years by the impact of drought-induced water scarcity, the problem arises principally because of Israeli water policies and practices which discriminate against the Palestinian population of the OPT. This discrimination has resulted in widespread violations of the right to an adequate standard of living, which includes the human rights to water, to adequate food and housing, and the right to work and to health of the Palestinian population. The inequality in access to water between Israelis and Palestinians is striking."

[Read the full report \(pdf\)](#)

[Statement on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory](#)

The World Council of Churches Central Committee at its meeting in September 2009, called on the Israeli government to freeze and begin to dismantle settlements in occupied Palestinian territories. It stated that the illegal settlements “and their corresponding infrastructure including the separation wall” have dire consequences on the life and dignity of Palestinian people, denying Palestinians’ access to “large parts of their land and water resources”. The statement “reiterates the need for an international boycott of settlement products and services”. WCC member churches “must not be complicit in illegal activities on occupied territory” and therefore should “practice morally responsible investment in order to influence businesses linked to the Israeli occupation and its illegal settlements”, the statement says.

[Full text of the WCC Central Committee statement](#)

[Water conflict in the Holy Land](#)

During the fifth of its Seven Weeks for Water 2011, the Ecumenical Water Network of the World Council of Churches addressed the lack of access to water and sanitation for Palestinians. “Discriminatory policies and practices in the development of water and sanitation infrastructure and in the allocation of the shared water resources are denying Palestinians access to sufficient amounts of water for domestic use as well as that required to secure livelihoods and food security,” the introduction to the week reads. The web resource includes a Biblical reflection by Fr Afrayem Elorshalimy from the Coptic Orthodox Church as well as a collection of fact sheets and articles.

[Read more](#)

[Permit restrictions cause Palestinians’ human hardship, says official \(Wafa\)](#)

The minister in charge of the Palestinian Water Authority, Shaddad Attili, has said that: “The Israeli Civil Administration continues to intentionally delay and obstruct Palestinian water and other infrastructure projects in Area C which ensures that Palestine’s water sector remaining underdeveloped and inadequate to meet current needs.” Permit restrictions imposed by the Israeli Civil Administration on the construction and rehabilitation of Palestinian water infrastructure in Area C cause enormous human hardship and destroy what little hope remained for building a viable Palestinian state.

[Read an article by the Emergency Water, Sanitation and Hygiene group](#)

[The right to water - A policy of denial and forced displacement in the Occupied Palestinian Territory](#)

The Palestinian Council of Human Rights Organisations (PCHRO) in a contribution to European External Action Service regarding implementation of an EU-Israel Action Plan in 2011 have highlighted access to water in the OPT as an issue that has yet to be properly examined by the EU.

The PCHRO submission argues that “for many years the Palestinian population of the OPT has suffered from a shortage of clean, safe water... Water is not scarce in the region, which contains several productive aquifers as well as the Jordan River and other natural water sources. However, the problem of water scarcity for Palestinians is

a direct result of Israel's water policies and practices in the OPT.”

[Read the PCHRO submission and a letter by the PCHRO to the EU-Israel Subcommittee on Political Dialogue and Cooperation \(pdf\)](#)

[**Core issues of the Palestinian-Israeli water dispute**](#)

Jad Isaac of the Applied Research Institute -Jerusalem (ARIJ) has, in a study, raised questions of rights to water resources. He finds that until now water as an issue has “been insufficiently addressed in both the multilateral negotiating fora and the Israeli-Palestinian bilateral agreements, the DOP and Cairo Agreement”. His conclusion is that “any attempt to bypass the allocation dispute will lead, at best, to an unstable final settlement.” The necessary measures outlined in the paper include “recognition of Palestinian water rights, and an increase in water supply to Gaza and the West Bank” as well as the adoption of a “Water Charter” which could serve as the “springboard for the agreement of an integrated water program in which allocation, conservation, enhancement and quality are considered as a totality”.

[Read the full report \(pdf\)](#)

[**Global Water Rights Movement joins forces with Palestine Solidarity Movement**](#)

In March 2012, developments led by the Palestinian water justice collective LifeSource signalled global solidarity with the Palestinian people and support for boycott, divestment and sanctions as a way to hold Israel and corporations accountable to human rights violations.

[Read LifeSource article](#)

[**Marseilles declaration for Palestinian water rights**](#)

A declaration made at the Alternative World Water Forum in April 2012 states: “For years, the United Nations Human Rights Committee and other UN bodies have found Israel to be in violation of Palestinians human right to water and sanitation as part of normal reviews of Israel's compliance with human rights treaties ratified by Israel.” The civil society representatives gathered in Marseille criticized that, despite numerous UN resolutions, “Israel's violations of Palestinians human right to water and sanitation are only increasing.”

“Military destruction of Palestinian water infrastructure is both a direct violation of the human right to water and a war crime under the Fourth Geneva Convention” the declaration affirms.

[Read full text of the Marseille declaration](#)

[**The "Water Occupation" of Palestine**](#)

In an article contributed to *PalestineChronicle.com* Stuart Littlewood asks: “How will British Water avoid complicity with Israel's endless oppression of the Palestinians and the deadly strife with its other neighbours in the region?” As an example, he points to the environmental services provider Veolia: “Veolia dumps Israeli waste on Palestinian land and is helping to build and run a tramway connecting Jerusalem with illegal Israeli settlements.”

[Read full article](#)

[Five things to know about water in relation to Israel and Palestine](#)

“The water rights of Palestinians,” writes Lucy Dunne in a post on the World Development Movement blog, are “severely compromised under the current Israeli occupation, and the 'peace process' as it has been conducted has actually often contributed to a worsening of this dire situation”. She continues with a list of five “key things to know, and also what you can do to help”.

[Read more](#)

[Scottish complicit in water apartheid in Palestine?](#)

“Water apartheid is a daily reality in the Occupied Palestinian Territories,” write the editors of the Scottish *Better Nation* blog, adding that “Scotland is not free from complicity in this.” In the context of a parliamentary motion in which the Scottish Green Party urged the government to withdraw subsidies to Eden Springs UK, guest blogger Tariq Al-Bazz charts the link between this Scottish water company and its Israeli parent company which sources its water on illegally occupied territory on the West Bank.

[Read more](#)

[A Green Prophet finds West Bank in water crisis too!](#)

In a 2008 post to her *Green Prophet* blog, Rachel Bernstein writes about an encounter with frustrated Palestinian farmers in Auja whose productivity had shrunk drastically after a nearby Jewish settlement tapped into the village's traditional source of water. “Unfortunately, Auja's situation is not unique,” she writes, quoting a report by the human rights organization B'tselem.

[Read more](#)

[Water management challenges in Palestine](#)

Despite the fact that this report by the Transnational Institute is four years old, most of the issues it raises are still valid. It concluded that “accumulated knowledge and capacity can create the potential for sustainable management of both resources and supply services in Palestine. However, with continued occupation, oppression, control of resources, and destruction of infrastructure, investment opportunities and sustainable management cannot be expected.”

[Read the article](#)

[Blue Planet Project publishes report in partnership with LifeSource calling for BDS](#)

Blue Planet Project, an international civil society movement, has published a report in partnership with the Palestinian water rights group LifeSource on the human right to water in Palestine “outlining Israeli violations of the human right to water and non-violent resistance to these violations, recommending the boycott of Israel.”

[Read an article by LifeSource](#) or the [full report \(pdf\)](#)

[Villages near Bethlehem face water crisis](#)

In June 2012, the Bahrain News Agency reported that seven villages near Bethlehem were without running water for more than 15 days. According to the Bethlehem Joint Services Council for Planning and Development, Israel's National Water Company (Mekorot) which the Palestinian government purchases from, has ignored the area's increase in population for 25 years, which has now reached 30,000.

[Read full article at the Thirsting for Justice website](#)

[Water apartheid leaves Palestinian children ill](#)

"Faqua is one of many Palestinian villages not connected to a water network," according to an article by Alex Abu Ata, an advocacy officer for the Emergency Water Sanitation and Hygiene group (EWASH), in the *Electronic Intifada* online magazine. "Unlike most of the other villages in the area," Ata writes, "Faqua is allocated a certain amount of water from the Mekorot (Israel's national water company) pipe that serves Jenin and is used to serve the Israeli settlements of Kadin and Ganim, which were evacuated in 2005." Yet, he adds, the allocated quantity "amounts to a mere 75 litres of water per person per day – well under the minimum of 100 litres recommended by the World Health Organization."

[Read the article](#)

[French parliament report accuses Israel of water "apartheid" in West Bank](#)

In January 2012, the French parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee published an unprecedented report accusing Israel of implementing "apartheid" policies in its allocation of water resources in the West Bank. The report said that water has become "a weapon serving the new apartheid". In an article published in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* at the time, diplomatic correspondent Barak Ravid summarizes the report.

[Read the article](#)

[Gaza's water could be undrinkable by 2016](#)

"Polluted water in the Gaza Strip is seriously affecting people's health and the situation looks set to get worse," the IRIN news service of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs summarizes a UN report published in August 2012. "Gaza's rapidly growing population of about 1.64 million – expected to increase by 500,000 by 2020 – could soon lose its main source of fresh water, the underground coastal aquifer, which could become unusable by 2016, with the damage irreversible by 2020," according to the IRIN release.

[Read the IRIN article](#) or the [full report \(pdf\)](#)

[Israelis get four-fifths of scarce West Bank water, says World Bank](#)

In May 2009, Rory McCarthy, who was the Jerusalem correspondent for the British newspaper *The Guardian* at the time, wrote that "A deepening drought in the Middle East is aggravating a dispute over water resources after the World Bank found that Israel is taking four times as much water as the Palestinians from a vital shared aquifer." The article emphasizes that 2009 marked the "fifth consecutive year of

drought” for the region, and that “the World Bank report found huge disparities in water use between Israelis and Palestinians, although both share the mountain aquifer that runs the length of the occupied West Bank.”

[Read the article](#)

Israel's war for water

“Many believe that water was the underlying reason for the invasion and occupation of the West Bank in 1967,” Marie Kennedy, professor emerita of community planning at the University of Massachusetts Boston, wrote in a feature article for the special issue on Water and Social Justice published in late 2006 by the Progressive Planning Magazine. “Among Palestinians,” she adds, “it is understood that the location of the apartheid wall (security fence in Israeli terminology) has more to do with continued Israeli control of the Western Mountain Aquifer than with security.” In order to analyze the “basis for these speculations”, she looks at the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict, current inequities and Israel's growing water shortage.

[Read the article](#)

West Bank and Gaza - assessment of restrictions on Palestinian water sector

At the request of the Palestinian Authority, the World Bank in 2009 published an assessment of restrictions on the Palestinian water sector. The report is the fourth in its Movement and Access study series. The goal of the assessment was to develop a balanced analysis and create awareness of the factors restricting Palestinian water sector development as well as of the economic, social, and environmental impacts of these restrictions. It addresses factors such as sector governance, and movement and access (M&A) restrictions beyond the control of the Palestinian Authority, as well as internal contributing factors, notably governance and capacity weaknesses of Palestinian institutions.

[Read full report \(pdf\)](#)

Video links

Troubled Waters: Palestinians Denied Fair Access to Water – October 2009

Video by Amnesty International USA summarizing the findings of the 2009 Amnesty International report on discriminatory water policies of the Israeli state. 4 min

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TtnBSLjaLWs>

Foul Smell: Treating Gaza's Wastewater under Israeli Blockade – March 2012

This video with information about the sewage problem in Gaza was produced by the Thirsting for Justice Campaign ambassadors (Palestinian youth living in the Gaza Strip). 6:30 min

<http://www.thirstingforjustice.org/new/foul-smell-treating-gazas-wastewater-under-israeli-blockade-3/>

Palestinians' Right to Water – May 2011

Animated video created by the Jerusalem Youth Parliament within the "saving our water" project in co-operation with the EWASH Thirsting for Justice campaign. 2 min

www.youtube.com/watch?v=L96wO-KJOHo

Water right in Palestine: Caravan – December 2011

Video by Paolo Rizzi, of the Italian Committee for the World Water Contract, about the "Caravan for Water Right in Palestine" organized by this Italian non-profit association in September 2011. 23 min

www.youtube.com/watch?v=AypTe-tjexM

Humanitarian impact of takeover of Palestinian water springs by Israeli settlers – March 2012

Video by YouTube user Jasmeen Islam, inspired by a [fact sheet](#) of the United Nations Office for the Coordination Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with images from the OPT. 3:30 min

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZFWmheIqs_M

The West Bank's acute water crisis – August 2008

Nour Odeh of the Qatar-based TV channel *Al Jazeera English* reports from the West Bank village of Saffarin, near Tulkarem. 3 min

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bX0i2ZQm0N0>

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