

# Water Crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

Since the beginning of the occupation in 1967, the demand for water by Palestinians has increased significantly. However, Israel's strict control of the water sector in the Occupied Territories has prevented development of this sector to meet the increasing demand for water, causing a water shortage and water quality crisis. Features of the water crisis include:

- **Discriminatory and insufficient supply of water**
- **Lack of water distribution systems in occupied Palestinian territory**
- **Poor water quality**

## Discriminatory and insufficient supply of water

- Since the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza strip Israel has instituted an unequal division of the shared surface and ground water.<sup>1</sup>
- Water in the occupied Palestinian Territories has been fully incorporated into the Israeli water-management system to the general benefit of Israel and detriment of Palestinians.<sup>1</sup>
- About 70% of groundwater on which Israel is dependent and 40% of its annual fresh water supply originate in Occupied Palestinian territories.<sup>1</sup>
- Of the water available from West Bank aquifers, Israel uses 73%, West Bank Palestinians use 17% and illegal Jewish settlements use 10%.<sup>3</sup>
- Average per capita daily water consumption of Palestinians in the West Bank is two-thirds of the amount recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO).
- Israeli settlers in the West Bank are allowed five times as much water as Palestinians.<sup>4</sup>
- Israeli per capita water consumption is 350 liters per person per day in Israel compared to 60 liters per person per day in the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem. West Bank Palestinian water consumption is 40 liters less than the minimum global standards set by WHO.<sup>5</sup>

### Aminah Jabarin has trouble running her household because of water shortage

Aminah Jabarin is a 47-year old homemaker with nine children. She takes care of their studies, food, clothes, and cleanliness. Her testimony below was taken by B'Tselem in 2008 about how the lack of running water impacts her family.<sup>7</sup>

*"I take special care of the small children. They play with friends in the neighborhood and come home with dirty clothes. In summertime, my children used to shower after playing and then again before going to sleep.*

*"For three years now, we've had a water problem in the summer. The water stops flowing in Tuqu's water network for long periods of time, up to 35 days in a row. We can't afford to dig a well, which is very expensive. My husband is our sole supporter. Our children are at university and in schools, which cost lots of money.*

*"We can't afford to buy water from tankers, because it's very expensive. Even when there isn't water in the pipes for a long time, we don't buy water. The children walk about five kilometers, from the center of Tuqu' to the wells in al-Bariyeh, on the edge of the village, to fill up bottles and bring them home. We don't have a car, and my husband is at work all day. I boil the water so we can drink it and cook with it.*

*"We wash the dishes in a bucket and save the water for the toilet. If each child goes to the toilet once a day, I need nine buckets of water a day just to flush it. I constantly worry that someone will go to the toilet, because I have to figure out where to get the water. I tell the children to use the toilet at school before they come home. This is one of the problems we have because of the lack of water flow.*

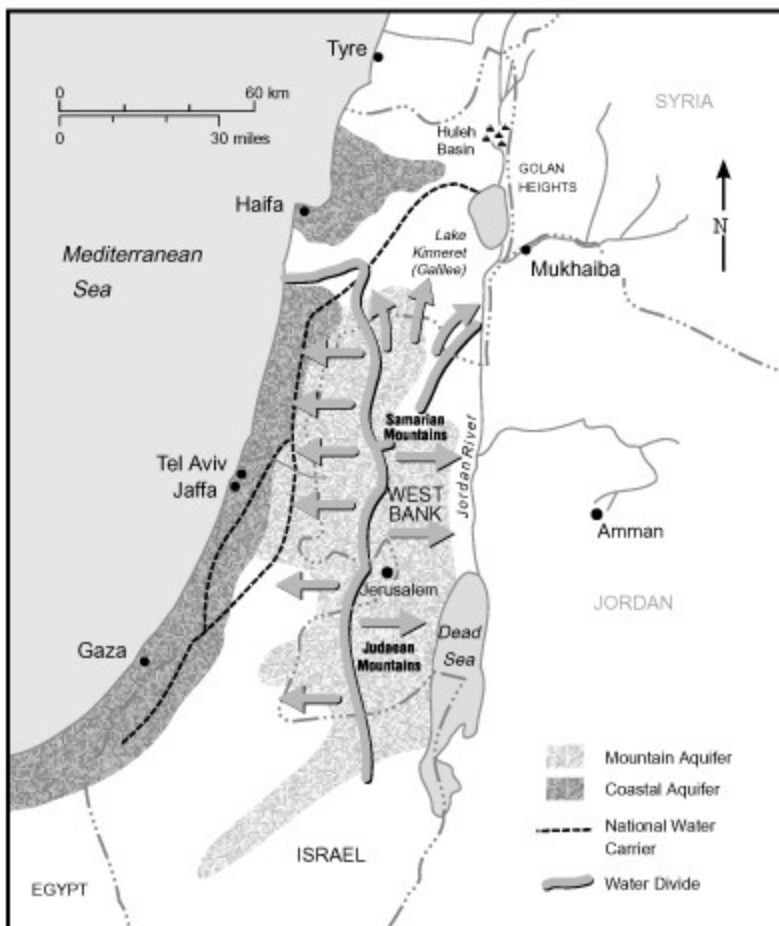
*"I wash our clothes by hand because we don't have enough water to use the machine. Laundering is really hard work. The small children play and dirty their clothes. The laundry piles up, and cleaning them takes lots of time and effort, as if I don't have other chores and responsibilities.*

*"I fall asleep completely exhausted from effort and worry. It hurts me to see my boys hauling bottles long distances to fill them up, especially on hot days. Worrying about water has become a nightmare, so much so that if you ask me what I want most, I would say water in my house all the time."*

- Due to the water shortage, many Palestinians have to buy water from tankers at three to six times higher than regular prices, forcing poor families to spend up to one-fifth of their income on water, compared to the slightly more than one percent that average-income Israeli families spend on water.<sup>6</sup>
- Israel is in control of all water development in the West Bank. Israel can veto any Palestinian requests to drill wells or collect surface water.
- It is difficult if not impossible for Palestinians in occupied territories to get permission to drill a new water well or even repair one that is near to an Israeli well.
- In several places where illegal settlements and Palestinian communities are connected to the same well the Israeli water provider, Mekorot, reduces or temporarily cuts off the supply to Palestinian customers. Some communities have their water cut for three months in the summer.
- The average daily per capita water consumption for the 48,000 residents of Tubas District, in the northeastern West Bank, is 30 liters. The average daily per capita water consumption for the 175 settlers in Beka'ot, in the Jordan Valley, twelve kilometers southeast of Tubas, is 401 liters.<sup>6</sup>

### Lack of water distribution systems in occupied Palestinian territory

- Israeli has neglected construction of infrastructure to connect the Palestinian rural population to a running-water network, and proper maintenance of existing networks to prevent water loss. Among those particularly suffering from the water shortage are residents of villages and refugee camps in the Occupied Territories not connected to a running-water network.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2008, 227,500 Palestinians, in 220 towns and villages were not connected to a water network. Another 190,000 Palestinians live in towns and villages in which a water network covered only part of the community.<sup>6</sup>



#### Israel Takes 79% of the shared groundwater aquifer and 100% of shared Jordan River water

- Israel and the Palestinian Authority fully share two water systems: the Mountain Aquifer and the Jordan Basin.
- Israel receives 79 percent of the Mountain Aquifer water and the Palestinians 21 percent.
- Palestinians have no access to the Jordan Basin: Israel utilizes 100% of its water.

#### Per Capita Water Consumption in Israel is five times that of the Palestinians<sup>5</sup>

- The average Israeli consumes 350 liters of water per day for domestic purposes
- The average Palestinian in occupied territory consumes 60 liters per day for domestic purposes
- The World Health Organization and the U.S. AID recommend 100 liters of water per person per day as the minimum quantity for basic consumption

- The old infrastructure results in the loss of two-thirds of the water running through the network, three times the average water loss in water networks in Israel. <sup>6</sup>
- The lack of regular treatment of most Palestinian sewage in the West Bank prevents purification and use for agricultural irrigation needs.<sup>6</sup>
- During the summer some West Bank municipalities distribute water only a few hours a day. Hebron, Bethlehem, and Jenin implement such rationing plans.
- In the West Bank, around 50 groundwater wells and over

200 cisterns have been destroyed or isolated from their owners by construction of the Separation Wall. This water was used for domestic and agricultural needs by over 122,000 people. To build the Wall, 25 wells and cisterns and 35,000 meters of water pipes have also been destroyed.<sup>3</sup>

- In 2003, the losses incurred by Palestinian farmers due to the Wall diverting water resources has been 2,200 tons of olive oil, 50,000 tons of fruit, and 100,000 tons of vegetables.<sup>3</sup>



### Poor water quality

- The sole local water source in Gaza is the Gaza Aquifer, which provides 96 % of overall water consumption in the Gaza Strip. Since the 1950s this aquifer has become polluted and salinated, a process that has worsened with the increased consumption.<sup>2</sup>
- The main reasons for the pollution and salinization of the aquifer are over-extraction, penetration of untreated sewage, and penetration of pesticides, fertilizers, and salts from irrigated agriculture.<sup>2</sup>
- The brackish Gaza water can have levels of chlorides that are five times over the 250 milligrams per liter maximum level recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO).
- Only 7% of the water in the Gaza Strip meets the WHO standards.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Watershed: The Role of Fresh Water in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict" International Develop Research Center, 1995

<sup>2</sup>"Thirsty for a Solution," B'Tselem report, July 2000

<sup>3</sup>"Water in Palestine," If Americans Knew Fact Sheet, [http://www.ifamericansknew.org/cur\\_sit/water.html](http://www.ifamericansknew.org/cur_sit/water.html)

<sup>4</sup>Amnesty International, "Enduring the Occupation: Palestinians Under Siege," 2007

<sup>5</sup>UN office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "The Humanitarian Impact On Palestinians Of Israeli Settlements And Other Infrastructure In The West Bank," July 2007, available at [www.ochaopt.org](http://www.ochaopt.org)

<sup>6</sup> B'Tselem World Water Day report, March 2009, available at [www.btselem.org/English/Water/2009](http://www.btselem.org/English/Water/2009)

<sup>7</sup> B'Tselem "The Water Crisis, May, 2008, available at <http://www.btselem.org/english/Testimonies/>

Aquifer map from Watershed: The Role of Fresh Water in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict" International Develop Research Center, 1995

### Any Interim or Final Peace Should Follow International Law

The main principle for division of water between countries, according to international law, is that of equitable and reasonable use. Israelis and Palestinians have similar current and potential water needs, and that the quantity allocated to each side for basic needs should adhere to international law.