

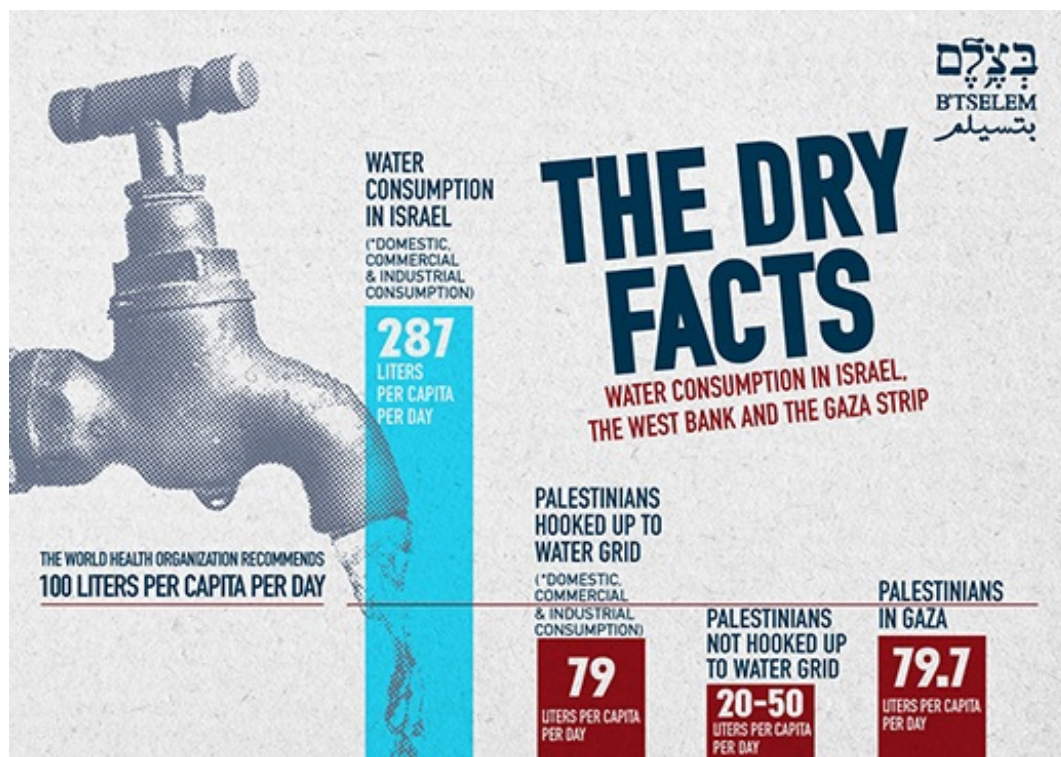
Background: Water crisis

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West Bank and Gaza Strip residents continuously suffer severe water shortages. In the West Bank, not enough water is provided to meet the population's needs, whereas the main concern in Gaza is the poor quality of available water. Access to water and proper sanitation is a basic right enshrined in international covenants to which Israel is a signatory. On 28 July 2010, the UN General Assembly explicitly recognized the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights. Shortly after, in September 2010, the UN Human Rights Council affirmed that the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation is derived from the right to an adequate standard of living.

The West Bank

The Oslo Accords established the division of water between Israel and the Palestinian Authority as follows: 80% of water in the West Bank pumped from the mountain aquifer – a joint Israeli- Palestinian resource – would be allotted to Israeli use and the remaining 20% for Palestinian use. This discriminatory allocation was slated to be an interim five-year arrangement, meant to remain in force only until the signing of final status accords. Under the temporary accords, the Palestinians were also supposed to develop independent water drilling projects in addition to the existing ones. However, development failed despite international aid, due both to limitations imposed by Israel and to technical difficulties. At present, Palestinians in the West Bank must purchase from Mekorot (Israel's national water company) double the amount water specified in the accords, an amount that now equals about one third of available water in the West Bank.



Figures regarding water usage make the discrimination against Palestinians in use of water resources shared by Israel and the Palestinian Authority patently obvious. According to the Palestinian Water Authority, average water consumption for domestic, commercial and industrial use in the West Bank in 2014 was approximately 79 liters a day, per person. According to the Israeli Water Authority, average domestic, commercial and industrial water consumption in Israel in 2014 was more than four times that figure: about 287 liters per person, per day.

The World Health Organization and USAID recommend 100 liters of water per person, per day. The said amount is meant to be enough for both domestic consumption as well as use by hospitals, schools, businesses, and other public institutions. However, modern urban systems require greater amounts of water. According to estimates by Israeli and Palestinian water experts, the amount needed to maintain a reasonable quality of life is about 150 liters per person, per day.

Whereas Israelis enjoy an unlimited supply of running water all year round, Palestinians are allotted a small fixed amount, resulting in constant water shortages. The problem is exacerbated in summer, when in order to ensure any sort of water supply, Palestinian water authorities are obliged set communities and neighborhoods on water-rotation. Consequently, residents must deal with lengthy intervals in which they receive no water whatsoever. In addition, the dearth of water causes a weak, slow flow through the pipes, making it difficult for the water to reach remote places and high elevations. The water shortage affects many aspects of human life – including drinking, hygiene, housework, industry, and agriculture – with severe implications for health and general welfare.

Another reason for water shortages in the West Bank is infrastructure that is timeworn, outdated, or absent altogether. Lack of proper infrastructure in [Area C](#) Extensive brings about extensive leakage and widespread water theft resulting in the loss of about one third of the West Bank's supply. The problem is particularly pronounced in Tul Karm District, where some 36% of the water does not reach consumers because of leakage along the pipelines. Upgrades to infrastructure depend on foreign aid and Israeli-Palestinian cooperation in Area C. The work also depends on obtaining Israeli authorization in the joint water committee and getting the relevant permits from the Civil Administration. Israel imposes obstacles in the way of the permits, making Palestinian agreement to the implementation of projects in Israeli settlements a prerequisite.

The Gaza Strip

Gaza's primary water source is the coastal aquifer, which has been continuously over-pumped for decades, even prior to Israel's occupation in 1967. At present, the Palestinian Water Authority pumps some 180 million cubic meters (mcm) a year from the aquifer, although its replenishment rate is only 50-60 mcm a year. Consequently, it is feared that the aquifer has passed the point of no return in terms of possible rehabilitation. The water currently pumped from the aquifer is saline and polluted, rendering 95% unfit for drinking and compelling residents to purchase treated water. According to UN estimates, water from the coastal aquifer will no longer be fit for human consumption in 2016, and all pumping from it must therefore stop. At present – early 2014 – there is no operative plan for building a desalination facility in the Gaza Strip or providing any alternative water source. Another longstanding problem in the Gaza Strip is the old, faulty water infrastructure. Approximately 44% of water is consequently lost, according to Palestinian Water Authority's figures for 2011. [Click here to read more on the water crisis in Gaza.](#)