

Discriminatory water supply

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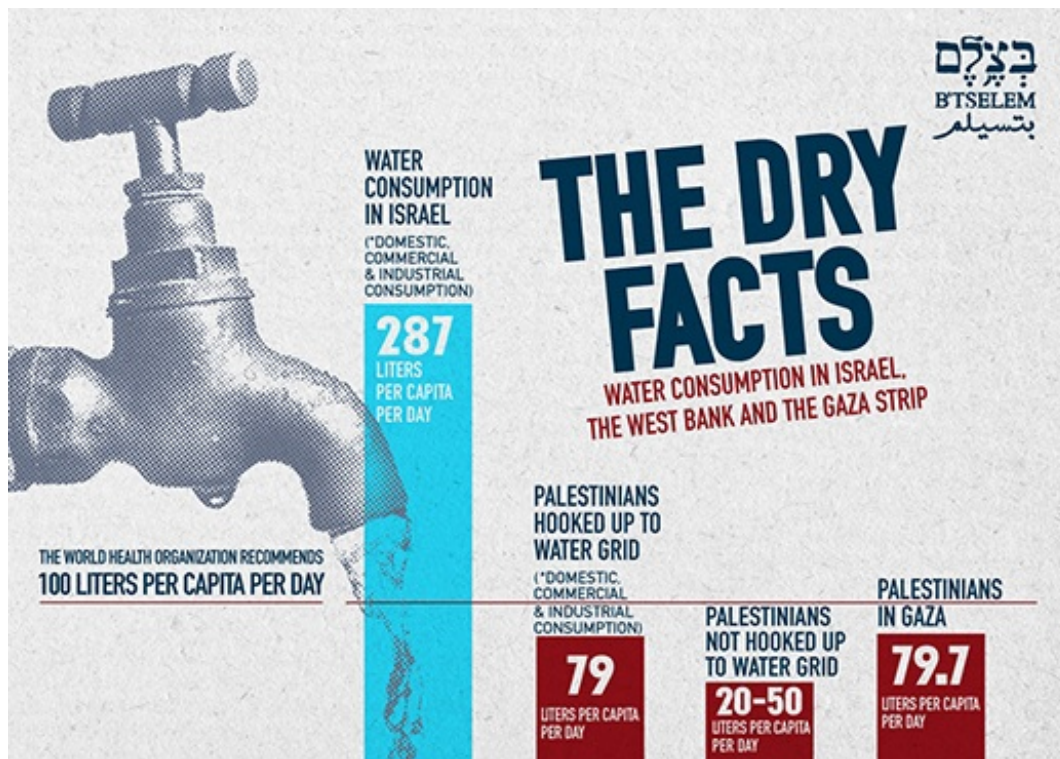


Boy draws water from cistern in village of Khirbet Jenbah, South Hebron Hills, which is not hooked up to water grid. Photo by Sharon Azran, B'Tselem, 7 August 2012

The Oslo Accords perpetuated the discrimination in allocation of water between Israel and the Palestinians. They allotted 80% of the water pumped from the mountain aquifer – one of three underground water reserves shared by Israel and the Palestinians – to Israel and only 20% to the Palestinians. The Accords further established there would be no cap to the supply of water to Israelis, whereas the water supply to Palestinians would be limited to predetermined amounts, namely approximately 118 million cubic meters (mcm) from drilling points active prior to the signing of the Accords and another 70-80 mcm or so from new ones.

At present, Palestinians in the West Bank must purchase from Mekorot (Israel's national water company) more than double the amount water specified in the accords, an amount that now equals about one third of available water in the West Bank.

In the absence of a final status arrangement, the Oslo Accords, meant to be valid only for five years, are still in place today. Yet even so, the measures set forth are only partially satisfied: while Israelis receive an unlimited water supply, Palestinians receive only about 75% of the stipulated quota. This situation is the result of several reasons, one being that under the temporary accords, Palestinians were to obtain some 118 mcm from independent drilling points, whereas in practice Palestinians yield only 73% of that amount. They fail to reach the designated amount due to technical limitations of their equipment, the particular properties of the aquifer and its water level, as well as the failure of U.S.- and German-aided attempts to drill for water in the aquifer's eastern basin. As a result, Israel gets 86% of the aquifer's water and the Palestinians only 14%. Even though Israel's national water company Mekorot currently sells Palestinians 63 mcm of water a year – two and half times the amount stipulated in the Oslo Accords – it is a far cry from meeting demand.



Due to the inequitable distribution, Palestinians must make do with less water than Israelis. The World Health Organization and USAID both recommend 100 liters of water per person/per day. This amount includes is not only for domestic use but includes supply to hospitals, schools, businesses, and other public institutions. Palestinian average daily consumption of water is more than 20% lower than the recommended amount. The figures on water allocation make the discrimination between Israelis and Palestinians patently palpable:

- Average water consumption in the West Bank for domestic, commercial, and industrial purposes is approximately 79 liters per person/per day. In the northern West Bank average consumption is even lower. According to 2014 figures, a mere 39 liters in the Jenin area and 56 liters in the Tubas area.
- Average water consumption in Israel is much higher. According to the Israeli Water Authority, average consumption for domestic, commercial and industrial use is 287 liters per person/per day– nearly four times the corresponding consumption in the West Bank. The lack of water in certain areas of the West Bank is exacerbated by Palestinian farmers’ illegal tapping into pipes supplying water to Palestinian villages. This occurs primarily in [Area C](#), where Israel is directly responsible for law enforcement.

Although most Palestinian communities are now connected to a central water network, there is simply not enough water to supply running water 24/7. Accordingly, Palestinian authorities provide water by rotation. Palestinian residents must deal with water shutoffs for days and sometimes even weeks at a time, a situation that is especially trying in summer. Israelis, by contrast, have the benefit of unlimited running water year round and round the clock.

A survey conducted by UN-OCHA in 2013 indicated that at the time, 180 Palestinian communities, which are located in full or in part in Area C of the West Bank and with a total population of about 30,000, were not connected to the water grid. In winter and autumn, they collect rainwater in cisterns close to their homes and use it water for all purposes. They do so despite storage conditions that make for poor quality water. In spring and summer, when the collected rainwater runs out, residents must rely on water from nearby springs and/or purchase from vendors of private water trucks vendors at a the cost of at least 30 NIS (approx. USD 9) per cubic meter (up to 400% as much as the price of water through the pipelines). Thousands of residents in these communities consume an average of only 20 liters per person per day. [Click here](#) for figures on water consumption in the West Bank.