

The Middle East is one of the world's most water-stressed regions, given its semi-arid nature, population growth and shared transboundary water resources . In addition, in Palestine in particular, water scarcity is hydro-politically induced. Since its 1967 occupation of the oPt, Israel has completely controlled our water resources and deprived us of access to an equitable and reasonable share of transboundary shared water, in violation of international law. Instead, Israel has used our water resources for its illegal settlements and meeting the demands of its growing population (natural and immigrants) , forcing our communities to purchase water from the Israeli company at high commercial prices.

Water Consumption

Palestine's water resources are all water shared with Israel mainly, and other neighboring countries. Palestine does not have any endogenous water resources. The first include:

- Surface water, including the Jordan River and Wadi Gaza,
- Groundwater resources, as aquifers, underlying the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

At present, Israel exploits over 90 percent of all transboundary water resources for exclusive Israeli use, and allocates less than 10 per cent for Palestinian use. This comes despite the fact that the great majority of the areas where the various aquifer basins are fed, or "recharged," lie within Palestine.

As a result, each Palestinian receives an average of less 73 liters per capita per day for domestic purposes, versus 300 liters per capita per day for an average Israeli. On average, we survive on less than the minimum requirement of 100 liters per day per capita recommended by the World Health Organization.

Israeli Control of Water

Since 1967, Israel has assumed control over all our water resources, thus depriving us of our right to access and use of one of our essential natural resources. Discriminatory measures adopted by the Israeli authorities include:

- Restricting our drilling of new water wells (especially in the Western Basin)
- Restricting our pumping or deepening of existing wells
- Denying us access to the Jordan River
- Restricting our access to areas with fresh water springs
- Limiting our ability to utilize runoff water (i.e. harvesting flash flood water from major valleys)
- Limiting our ability to develop water and sewage infrastructure

At the same time, wells for Israeli settlements, a few of which are strategically located over areas characterized by

high groundwater potential, are approved without delay and routinely drilled. Due to high pumping rates, these wells often dry up more shallow Palestinian wells located in the area. In the absence of access to any other water resource, our communities have no option but to purchase water, at a high cost, from the Israeli water company, that ironically pumps the water from the aquifers underlying the West Bank.

Israel's iniquitable use of our water resources continued uninterrupted during the Oslo negotiations. This is supported by the fact that today Palestinians have access to less water quantities than prior to the signing of the 1996 Interim Oslo Agreement- with current water availability at 98 MCM as compared to 118 MCM. Meanwhile, our population has doubled since the signing of the Oslo agreement, meaning that the water available to us, per capita, has fallen dramatically.

During the pre-Oslo period in which Israel was solely responsible for water-related issues in the oPt, Israel failed to invest adequately in water and wastewater infrastructure to serve our communities. Since the signing of the Interim Agreement, Israel has consistently used the veto power to prevent us from undertaking projects designed to develop groundwater resources and wastewater treatment plants in the West Bank.

In addition to utilizing a disproportionate amount of water, Israeli settlements have caused significant environmental damage. Settlers discharge domestic, agricultural and industrial wastewater and solid wastes into nearby valleys without treatment. Polluting industries, such as aluminum and plastics, as well as waste disposal sites, have been transferred into the West Bank, particularly over the past 20 years as environmental controls in Israel have tightened. These practices threaten the quality of the groundwater and the surface water resources shared by the two parties.