

[Seven Weeks for Water 2016](#)



Children in Gaza fetching water. © EWN, 2014.

According to the Christian tradition, Lent is a time to prepare for the celebration of the death and resurrection of Christ. During this period many people engage in fasting and practice moderation or self-denial in order to focus on repentance and consecrating oneself to God. While water has a strong spiritual significance in the Christian tradition as a gift of God, this scarce resource is threatened and denied to millions around the world.

The EWN invites you to use this season of Lent

to reflect on water. [Since 2008](#), the EWN has been providing weekly theological reflections and other resources on water for the seven weeks of Lent and for World Water Day on 22 March.

Thirst for Justice

"Jerusalem is a most significant destination for the pilgrimages by people of all three faiths of the book, and a place where they live side by side. And yet, in this holy place, we have confronted a most unholy reality: the terrible suffering of the Palestinian people from lack of clean water and adequate sanitation. And what is lacking in Palestine is not water; what is lacking is justice. The Palestinian people thirst for water justice."

([EWN Jerusalem statement, June 2014](#))

The WCC's [Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace](#) will have a regional focus on the Middle East in 2016. Accordingly, the Seven Weeks for Water in 2016 will take us on a **pilgrimage of water justice in the Middle East, with specific reference to Palestine**. The Biblico-theological reflections and resources for the seven weeks will be based on the water crisis in Middle East region and take into consideration issues of justice and peace.

During Lent 2016, various activities around the Seven Weeks for Water will take place in the Middle East, particularly in Palestine, starting with a launch in Jerusalem on 10 February (Ash Wednesday according to the Western traditions of Christianity):

[Order of service for Ash Wednesday and launching of Seven Weeks for Water](#)

Leaders of the WCC, the Middle East Council of Churches and local churches will participate in the launch ceremony.

Reflections, liturgies and other resources will be uploaded to the EWN website every week, starting from 8 February:

Week 1: [And we are still thirsty for water!](#) Bishop Munib Younan, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

Week 2: [The water of life - not in Palestine. A Kairos perspective.](#) Hind Khoury, Kairos Palestine

Week 3: [Pilgrimage of Justice through the Beatitudes of Matthew \(5:3-12\).](#) Ani Ghazaryan Drissi, World Council of Churches

Week 4: [Water: from a spiritual feature to a factor of discrimination in the Holy Land.](#) Michel Jalakh, Middle East Council of Churches

Week 5: [When Israel uses water as a tool of coercion, churches must act decisively.](#) Ranjan Solomon, Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum

More readings: [Order of Service World Water Day 2015](#) and [Reflections on Morning Prayers 23 March 2015.](#)

You can also download and make free use of EWN resources found under [Documents on water and sanitation.](#)

[Sign up to be notified by email](#) about newly published reflections!

And we are still thirsty for water!

 water.oikoumene.org/en/whatwedo/seven-weeks-for-water/2016/munib-younan



Near Dkaika, a Bedouin village in the Judean desert, south of Hebron. Photo © Åsa Elfström, EWN

Reflection for the first of the [Seven Weeks for Water 2016](#)

Week 1

Please note: Opinions expressed in Biblical reflections or background resources do not necessarily reflect EWN and WCC policy.

By Bishop Munib Younan

[Click here for Arabic translation \(pdf\)](#)

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

(Revelation 22:1-2, ESV)

Salaam and grace to you from Jerusalem, the Holy City. As an Arab Christian, I am thankful for the opportunity to write a reflection for this year's "Seven Weeks for Water". Of course, this part of the world always has been dealing with water issues because of its dry climate and few water resources. Today, however, the Palestinian people face an even greater water challenge. It is a crisis that grows worse year after year.

The first reason for the current water crisis stems from the fact that, although Israelis and Palestinians share the same mountain aquifer resource, 80% of the water is pumped to Israelis while Palestinians have access to just 20 percent. This 20% is not adequate for Palestinians' needs, based on water consumption guidelines from the World Health Organization. As a result, Palestinians must purchase from Israel the water that has been pumped from under Palestinian land. (www.btselem.org/water)

This unequal access has of course led to unequal usage. Israelis, on average, consume 183 liters of water per day,

while Palestinians consume just 73. The WHO recommendation is 100 liters per day for basic human needs, and 150 for a reasonable quality of life. (www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/diseases/wsh0302)

The second reason for today's water crisis is crumbling infrastructure in the West Bank. Decades of military occupation mean communities don't have enough resources to build or repair new systems of water collection, storage and purification. Often projects attempted by Palestinian communities are stopped through political maneuvers of the occupation – for example, denying permits for construction unless Israelis are allowed to do similar construction in illegal settlements.

As you can see, water and justice issues are intertwined in my community. The water crisis will not be solved until justice is achieved.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

The water crisis in my community gives this reading from the Book of Revelation special significance for us today. The city the author describes is a "New Jerusalem", where water flows freely along with healing, peace, and justice for all. But as I sit in my church office here in Jerusalem, I know very well there is no such river flowing through the city. Here in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, we are still thirsty for healing. We are still thirsty for peace. We are still thirsty for justice for all people – Palestinian and Israeli, Jew, Christian and Muslim.

And we are still thirsty for water.

Sometimes when we read Scripture texts like this, the "river of the water of life" may seem abstract, like a dream. But for Palestinians living without enough water, the problem is far from abstract. The residents of Bethlehem are often without water for ten to twenty-one days. At times, there is no water at our Lutheran schools in the community. Can you imagine what a school of three hundred middle-school-age girls is like without water? In such a circumstance, we are forced to purchase tanks of water in order to keep the schools open. This is all the more painful when we see that our neighbours in illegal settlements are enjoying their swimming pools and are watering their lawns. We remain thirsty for justice and equality.

Water is not a luxury for human beings. It is a necessity! It not only cleans, it refreshes. It not only quenches thirst, it renews life. Water is always mentioned as a source of life in the Bible. When Abraham entertained the three angels, he gave them water, saying "My lord, if I find favour with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree." (Genesis 18:3-4) The prophet Isaiah said to the people, "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!" (Isaiah 55:1) And when Jesus talked with the woman at the well, he said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." (John 4:13-14)

Our faith tells us water is a gift from God to be shared by all of creation. This understanding of water as flowing from God's goodness is seen very clearly in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hope in Ramallah. There in the stained glass we see depicted the seven days of creation. In the centre is the lamb of God and the New Jerusalem, with the river of the water of life flowing from the window above the altar. It appears as if the water is flowing from the New Jerusalem and the altar, through the middle of the congregation.

This is a beautiful image. But it is also a beautiful promise! As baptized followers of Jesus, we believe that the waters of creation, the waters of justice, the waters of peace and the waters of equality are gifts from God for all of God's people. They flow from the heart of God. And they flow from the foot of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thoughts and questions for reflection

During this Lenten season, we may ask ourselves:

- In our daily lives, do we treat water as a gift from God, or as something to which we are entitled?
- Do we thirst for justice as much as we thirst for a drink of water?
- Those who enjoy the privileges of free-flowing justice and equality often find it difficult to understand the plight of others. During this Lenten season, how can you increase your thirst for justice? For equality? For the presence of God?
- What is our responsibility to speak up for those who have unequal access to water?

Let us pray:

Holy God, author of creation, we give you thanks for the gift of water. Increase our thirst for your presence during this Lenten season. Open our eyes to see where the flowing waters of justice have been blocked by human sin. Open our mouths to speak up for those who thirst for an equal measure of the gifts of creation. Open our hearts to share the water of life with all. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

** The Rt Rev. Dr Munib Younan is the bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and one of the presidents of the Middle East Council of Churches. Currently he is also the president of Lutheran World Federation.*

The water of life - not in Palestine. A Kairos perspective

 water.oikoumene.org/en/whatwedo/seven-weeks-for-water/2016/the-water-of-life-not-in-palestine-a-kairos-perspective



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Reflection for the [Seven Weeks for Water 2016](#)

Week 2

Please note: Opinions expressed in Biblical reflections or background resources do not necessarily reflect EWN and WCC policy.

By Hind Khoury

[Click here for Arabic translation \(pdf\)](#)

*“To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.”
(Revelation 21:6)*

It is not a coincidence that our holy book, the Bible, comes from a desert area: Palestine, Jordan and Egypt. In fact, water has been and continues to be truly the source and essence of life. What the Israelites experienced in biblical times, drought and water shortages, is the experience of Palestinians today.

The issue of water is a common theme throughout the Bible. It begins with the separation of water from water in Genesis (1:6) and ends in Revelation (21:6) with an appeal to everyone, sending the message of salvation in terms of God’s gift, the water of life. Every Christian is baptized with water, showing the very essential and important meaning water has in the Christian religion.

Water is a source of life and a gift of God to all. This becomes especially clear when we read the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4:4-10), when Jesus is talking about the water of life, a synonym for salvation. But also in a literal sense water remains an essence of life. The dialogue between Jesus as a Jew and the woman as a Samaritan makes it very clear; water is life and should be distributed equally to everyone despite his or her cultural, religious or ethnic background. You can even draw the conclusion that everyone is responsible to work for access to water for everyone in this world. In the world today, we call that a human right – the right to have access to water.

Palestinian thirst for justice

As proclaimed by the Bible, in Occupied Palestine (OP) the centrality of water is crucial for life and human dignity. However, Israeli apartheid policies contribute to an alarming water shortage that denies Palestinians their most basic rights and threatens their very future on their land. These policies are leading to a "drying out" of Palestine.

Since 1967, existing shared ground water resources in historical Palestine (Israel proper and Occupied Palestinian Territories) are inequitably and unjustly exploited to serve Israel and its colonial settlers, to the extent of 80% according to Al-Haq, a Palestinian Human Rights Organization. In addition, all the surface water provided by the Jordan River is diverted to Israel while Palestinians are denied any access to this vital resource.

Gaza, a growing human catastrophe

The ground water resource in Gaza has been depleted as Israel has impeded the natural flow of ground water flowing into this aquifer. Later, as part of its water embargo, it surrounded the borders of the Gaza Strip with many deep wells and diverted the Wadi Ghaza waters to its own agricultural fields prior to its arrival in Gaza.

In Gaza, water and sanitation infrastructure have been the regular targets of years of Israeli attacks and destruction. Overcrowding, the three recent wars and the military siege have led to a total contamination of the groundwater, making it unfit for human consumption and leading to waterborne diseases, thus making of Gaza one of the worst catastrophes in the world regarding the absence of drinking water.

In the footsteps of Gaza

After decades of occupation, the water issue also is one of the most essential problems Palestinians are facing in the West Bank, where they barely have access to 20% of this important resource. With the Oslo process which divides the West Bank in Areas A, B and C things became even worse. A so-called "Joint Water Committee" has been established in order to distribute water resources in the West Bank equitably to both, Israelis and Palestinians. Israel never applied this principle to Area C, which constitutes 51 % of the West Bank. Any development in Area C requires the approval of the Israeli Civil Administration yet this is most often denied due to so-called "security reasons", but it is most surely allowed to Israeli settlements. In fact, water consumption by colonial settlers, with their agricultural and industrial investments, quality housing, lawns and swimming pools, exceeds that of Israelis living within Israel proper.

According to Ma'an Development Centre, Israel as the occupying power has also isolated hundreds of wells, prohibiting Palestinians from using them. The Israeli administration decides the location of wells and their depths – and these decisions are made, of course, in favour of Israeli settlement companies. Fruit and vegetable exporters like "Mehadrin" or "Arava" produce fruits like dates, bananas, grapes, tomatoes and a lot more for the big European supermarket chains, while Palestinian farmers have to manage the little land and water they are allowed and hence produce too little even for the domestic market.

A Kairos call for resistance

The Kairos Palestine Document, a word of faith, hope and love, has been a call to Palestinians and the world for more than six years now. It's a call to resist the injustice of Israeli occupation because resistance against any form of injustice is a right and a duty for Christians:

"Seeing the image of God in the face of the enemy means taking up positions in the light of this vision of active resistance to stop the injustice and oblige the perpetrator to end his aggression and thus achieve the desired goal, which is getting back the land, freedom, dignity and independence." (KP Document 4.2.3)

As a movement of nonviolent resistance, Kairos Palestine advocates for creative resistance in the logic of love and

draws on all energies to make peace. An example of creative resistance is of course to engage in divestment and in an economic and commercial boycott of everything produced by the occupation. Besides the agricultural exports, there are massive international investments in Mekorot, the Israeli public water company which has cooperation agreements with countries around the world. We understand that divestment and boycott integrate the logic of love and peaceful resistance. The objective is not revenge but rather to put an end to the existing evil, liberating both the perpetrators and the victims of injustice. Freeing both peoples from extremist positions adopted under different Israeli governments brings justice and reconciliation.

Our faith provides us with hope, even when hope is so distant. Our Kairos Palestine call ends with a vision of a peaceful future: “We believe in God, good and just. We believe that God’s goodness will finally triumph over the evil of hate and of death that still persists in our land. We will see here ‘a new land’ and ‘a new human being’, capable of rising up in the spirit to love each one of his or her brothers and sisters.” Amen.

Thoughts for reflection:

- How would Jesus, known as a man of justice and as an advocate for the oppressed, react to Israeli apartheid policies?
- Think about other stories connected to water in the Bible. Can you draw connections to the situation the Palestinian people face today?
- Think of your local supermarket: Is it really right that tomatoes from the Israeli Occupation are cheaper than the ones from your local farmers? What does that mean?
- Place yourselves in the shoes of Palestinians, how would you react to the suffering imposed on them?

What you can do:

- Study and review the Kairos Palestine Document to better understand the context of Palestinian suffering and what God requires of us as Christians and people of conscience.
- Support the international BDS (boycotts, divestment, sanctions) campaign. Advocate for a boycott of Israeli agricultural products from the Jordan Valley.
- Talk about the Palestinian/Israeli conflict in your church. ARIJ and Al-Haq provide excellent maps and other resources on the denial of water access for Palestinians.
- Participate in conferences and seminars related to the Palestinian search for justice and peace, and respond to calls for action and advocacy.
- Ask your local supermarket chain about their trade partners – where does your orange come from? Protest against the illegal trade with products from settlements which most of the time are not even labelled as products from an occupied land.
- Come and see! Visit us in Palestine, see with your own eyes the “drying out of Palestine” and join us in the common struggle against the illegal and inhuman occupation of Palestine.

Resources:

- Al Haq 2013, [“Water for one people only – Discriminatory Access and ‘Water-Apartheid’ in the OPT”](#).
- Applied Research Institute Jerusalem (ARIJ) 2012, [“Water resource allocations in the occupied Palestinian territory: Responding to Israeli Claims”](#) (pdf).
- StopTheWall Factsheet: [“Israel’s water company Mekorot – Nurturing Water Apartheid in Palestine”](#) (pdf).

**Ms Hind Khoury is a Palestinian economist. She served as minister of Jerusalem Affairs with the Palestinian Authority and then as Ambassador to France from year 2006-2010. Currently she is the secretary general of Kairos Palestine, a Christian Palestinian movement, born out of the Kairos Document, which advocates for ending the Israeli occupation and achieving a just solution to the conflict.*

Pilgrimage of Justice through the Beatitudes of Matthew (5:3-12)

 water.oikoumene.org/en/whatwedo/seven-weeks-for-water/2016/blessed-are-those-who-hunger-and-thirst-for-righteousness



“As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God” – © Paul and Cathy/flickr

Reflection for the [Seven Weeks for Water 2016](#)

Week 3

Please note: Opinions expressed in Biblical reflections or background resources do not necessarily reflect EWN and WCC policy.

By Ani Ghazaryan Drissi*

[Click here for Arabic translation \(pdf\)](#)

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...”
(Matthew 5:6a)*

The justice and righteousness of the fourth beatitude are presented by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew as a necessity. This justice is the way to happiness promised by the fourth beatitude: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:6). Only those who hunger and thirst for divine justice will be satisfied and filled with happiness. However, for centuries, a major question arises over the meaning of this justice: what is the justice that Matthew presents? Why, contrary to the evangelist Luke who presents a physical hunger and thirst (Luke 6:21), does Matthew emphasize the need to suffer hunger and thirst for righteousness? What kind of justice does the first Gospel present?

Justice (δικαιοσύνη) in the Gospel of Matthew does not refer to the right due to each or, as in the Epistles of Paul, where the believer receives the justice from God for free. For Matthew, as in Jewish writings, justice is a commitment: a loyalty, a life adjusted to the desire of a God to which the believer decides to be close (see Matthew 3:15; 5:20; 6: 1.33; 21:32). Justice is a key word for Matthew; it refers to all that is related to the will of God according to Scripture, either in relations with others (Matthew 5:20) or the right attitude toward God (Matthew 6:1). Longing for justice is as much to commit to the divine will by a life of fidelity as waiting impatiently to come into the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:10).

Justice in the first Gospel is faithfulness to God. The hunger and thirst for justice are hunger and thirst for a world where biblical values are important, a world that lives in the spirit of the beatitudes. Every human being has need of divine justice. The need for justice is even more emphasized among the poor, the oppressed, and the bereaved.

Today, the desperate cry of the poor from the Middle East is limitless. Deprivation of water in the region where they live adds to the various forms of injustice they face. Water is a scarce resource in the Middle East. This region has a dry climate and therefore water scarcity becomes more and more critical to the survival of people living in these countries. On top of it, unjust restrictions imposed on Palestinians by Israel further aggravates the challenges in access to water for Palestinians. Thus, the living conditions of the Palestinian people are deteriorating day by day because of an unfair distribution of water by Israel ... Palestinians are doubly victimised. They face the physical thirst for water and the thirst for justice! The challenge, therefore before us is how to address this source of conflict, *the water*, which could become a source of peace! A fair and equitable distribution of water resources remains to be negotiated between the various parties.

The demand of the oppressed people is simply the right to live, to exist, the right to not be hungry and thirsty. The restoration of divine justice is so important for these humans that they are comforted by the idea and the promise that God will not abandon them even during the persecutions they suffer every day in Syria, Iraq, Palestine and the Middle East region.

Matthew mentions the hunger and the thirst for righteousness, but also mentions the persecution in the name of justice (Matthew 5:10) that appears in the eighth beatitude. In fact, in this beatitude, it is not only the complaint that the world is not as we would imagine, or the discouragement of waiting for a happier ending. Matthew attests to the need for vigilance, a fight for a more just world. André Chouraqui, translating the word 'happy' with 'walking ...', reflects upon the profound dynamic of the beatitudes which, far from leading to the comfort of a sleeping conscience, calls for mobilization. Not forgetting the One who spoke these words, it is an invitation to a pilgrimage towards justice and peace. Thousands of women, children and men are walking now from the Middle East to 'safer' countries with the aim of finding a consolation, a happiness, a life of happiness that God promises through His justice. The suffering of this world can bring one who endures to shrivel; the beatitudes urge one to open oneself to God. By relying on God, the believer opens his eyes on himself and lives in this world, measuring the world's need for God and others.

If 'hunger and thirst' embody the gap between what we live and the world to which we aspire, they force awareness and the need to take action. The world needs justice. God's promises are not to be neglected, but they must be taken as a responsibility; rather than waiting for a day that falls from the sky, you should yourself be a sign of this different world to which we aspire. The beatitudes are not intended for the weakened believer only – they are addressed to everyone who tries to speak, every human. They are universal (God is not even named): the highest number of humans can adopt the text, beyond the limits of the ecclesiastical institution. God does not deserve: He will appear to those who act in His name, as He will give himself to those who are looking for him.

Psalm 42

To the leader. A Maskil of the Korahites.

¹ As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.

² My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.

When shall I come and behold
the face of God?

³ My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me continually,

'Where is your God?'

⁴ These things I remember,
as I pour out my soul:
how I went with the throng,
and led them in procession to the house of God,
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving,
a multitude keeping festival.

⁵ Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help ⁶and my God.

My soul is cast down within me;
therefore I remember you
from the land of Jordan and of Hermon,
from Mount Mizar.

⁷ Deep calls to deep
at the thunder of your cataracts;
all your waves and your billows
have gone over me.

⁸ By day the Lord commands his steadfast love,
and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.

⁹ I say to God, my rock,
'Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I walk about mournfully
because the enemy oppresses me?'

¹⁰ As with a deadly wound in my body,
my adversaries taunt me,
while they say to me continually,
'Where is your God?'

¹¹ Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my help and my God.

Thoughts for Reflection:

- Keep in your thoughts Psalm 42: "... My soul thirsts for God, for the living God...".

Questions for Discussion:

- What does it mean for you to hunger and thirst for righteousness/justice?
- What is the justice that Matthew presents?

What you can do:

- Prepare a discussion / presentation on water justice in your community and inform as much as possible about the issues related to water justice in the world.
- Organize an ecumenical prayer about the theme of water, to mobilize the churches in your region to reflect on the issue of 'water justice'.

**Dr Ani Ghazaryan Drissi is a member of the Secretariat of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches; she is from the Armenian Apostolic Church, Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.*

Water: from a spiritual feature to a factor of discrimination in the Holy Land

 water.oikoumene.org/en/whatwedo/seven-weeks-for-water/2016/water-from-a-spiritual-feature-to-a-factor-of-discrimination-in-the-h



Mamilla Pool, Jerusalem. © Ze'ev Barkan, 2013

Reflection for the [Seven Weeks for Water 2016](#)

Week 4

Please note: Opinions expressed in Biblical reflections or background resources do not necessarily reflect EWN and WCC policy.

By Fr Michel Jalakh

[Click here for Arabic translation \(pdf\)](#)

The gap between demand and supply of water in the Middle East--and the urgent need to reduce the gap needs to be discussed seriously. We need to address the challenges and the available opportunities to ensure sustainability of water in the region. Today, on the eve of Lent, and upon the attention of the international organizations and non-governmental and humanitarian organizations upon the subject of water, due to its importance for the continuity of life and by coincidence with the World Water Day, several questions are asked in terms of the Middle East as a whole or the Holy Land in particular. Water is a basic necessity of daily life, and cannot be dispensed with because of its importance for humans, animals and plants. Towns and villages were established only where there was a resource of water. In this context, Apostle Peter says, "By God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water." (2 Peter 3:5).

Since ancient times, life in the Holy Land was dependent on rain and spring water in mountainous areas, and river water elsewhere. Since that time, the Canaanites invented--then the Israelites afterwards--ways to protect water resources from enemy attack. They dug tunnels to reach groundwater wells or ponds, and a number of these have been discovered in a few Palestinian cities.

Before going into the current and vital reality of water, there is a spiritual and biblical feature that highlights its importance in the life of the community. The Bible came to mention "water" several times, as it prescribed the

necessities of life to man (Genesis 21: 14-19), and this is illustrated strongly from what happened to David when he endangered the mighty warriors themselves and they brought him water from the well of Bethlehem (1 Chronicles 11: 17- 19).

Water is used metaphorically to express numerous ideas, as water symbolizes God's salvation, as Isaiah says, "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation," (Isaiah 12: 3; 41: 17). Likewise, water is used in baptism as a symbol of death with Christ, burial and resurrection. Jesus surprised Nicodemus with the birth of water when he said to him: "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3: 5). Jesus also spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar about the "living water," that whoever drinks from it will not be thirsty forever (John 4:14). In fact, Jesus concluded his life on earth saying "I am thirsty." (John 19:28).

From the spiritual dimension to the daily reality, and with the beginning of the year 2016, several studies indicate that about 33 countries are expected to face a severe water crisis by 2040, especially the countries which are located in the Middle East region, where water bodies are scarce and demand for water intensifies.[1]

Studies also predict that 13 countries in the Middle East--with the Palestinian territories at their forefront--will face a severe water crisis within 25 years. Palestine has been ranked along with eight countries among the global top ten countries for these crises.

Palestine, like the other countries in the region, suffers from a major water crisis, and the people concerned identify the primary reason for this crisis is regrettably the Israeli occupation and its control over the water, including its deprivation of millions of the Palestinian population of its sufficient and dignified use. The problem has been entrenched in the agreements that were unfair to the Palestinians, and deprived them of their water, and did not give them their natural right in this matter. Israel, which was controlling the water as it saw fit before the Oslo Accords, continued in doing so after Oslo, but under the title of partnership. The international community turns out to accept such practices, or at least stay silent about them, under the pretext that it wants the peace process to succeed.

Going back to the beginning of this problem — that is to say after the occupation of the West Bank in 1967 — Israel occupied the Baniyas River, which supplies water to Jordan River, and the water-rich Golan Heights. The water situation in Palestine has not changed since then. Today the Palestinians face several challenges for getting access to water, most notably: Prevention of drilling new wells, or discharging springs, or extending pipelines, or even maintaining the wells. In contrast, the Israeli authorities continue to destroy water facilities in the pretext of lacking clearance.

These violations are not all, as Israel had begun its aggressions since 1964, when it began exploiting the Jordan River basin water, without taking into account the rights of the states that share the river. According to international law, "Johnston Plan 1955" or the Jordan Valley Unified Water Plan the Palestinians have the right to around 200 million m³ of water of the Jordan River, and in fact, what they get is very little. The reason being the proposed West Ghor Canal was never built due to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank in 1967. [2] Israel has also drained the Hula Lake and transferred the river water to the Negev desert, under the pretext of greening the desert; knowing that 97% of the Negev desert remained uncultivated, and this constitutes the biggest waste of water.

Therefore in conclusion, it can be said that the Israeli occupation is the main factor for the water crisis in the Holy Land, for reasons that are certainly political and possibly religious, for the Bible mentions the water many times, especially in the Promised Land. From here we raise our prayers in fasting and pray to God to protect His people, and be gracious to them and to the wealth of their land, as it is a gift from God and a blessing that has become a "curse" for the people of Jerusalem and the occupied territories, with the lack of water.

*The Fr Dr Michel Jalakh is the general secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches and a Maronite Catholic

from Beirut, Lebanon.

[1] [Ranking the World's Most Water-Stressed Countries in 2040](#)

[2] [Water and Economic Justice, March 2014 - Friends of the Earth International \(pdf\)](#)

When Israel uses water as a tool of coercion, churches must act decisively

 water.oikoumene.org/en/whatwedo/seven-weeks-for-water/2016/when-israel-uses-water-as-a-tool-of-coercion-churches-must-act-c



Water tankers provided by donor agencies filling water from Gaza's only desalination plant. © WCC/Asa Elfström

Reflection for the [Seven Weeks for Water 2016](#)

Week 5

Please note: Opinions expressed in Biblical reflections or background resources do not necessarily reflect EWN and WCC policy.

By Ranjan Solomon*

[Click here for Arabic translation \(pdf\)](#)

In Gaza, 30 to 40 percent of all disease-related deaths are caused by bad water [1]. The multiple cases of kidney and liver diseases Gaza have to do with salts and minerals in the water. 95% of the water that Palestinians in Gaza have been consuming for decades has been proven unfit for human consumption[2].

Israel's ten-year old blockade of Gaza is dominantly a war waged on water. Israel knows that when it obstructs supplies to refurbish, preserve, or develop water infrastructure, it protracts the damage done during times of attack. Restricting Palestinian access to water has turned what was once a community-managed resource into a commodity now unaffordable to most people. Israel has made water a legitimate tool of coercion and control to achieve the Occupation's goals. In all military operations, Israel has perpetuated the humanitarian crises by targeting and relentlessly adopting a policy of destroying Palestinian water resources. One often finds Arab villages and Jewish locations barely a mile or two apart living with scandalous differences in water allocations. While Israelis enjoy lush gardens, swimming pools and gardens, the Palestinians must make good with water whose quality is downgraded. It tastes bad or has foreign particles floating in it. But, they will accept it because there is no alternative. Bad water is better than no water at all.

Israel is not only perpetuating a regime of perverse water ceilings for Palestinians. Through the restrictions, it is both weakening Palestinian morale and pocketbooks. The policy of denying Palestinian communities access to water must actually be viewed as a tool of warfare that is undermining Palestinian resistance. Materials being allowed to enter Gaza, like generators, limited fuel, and water trucks, only compensate temporarily and are mere eyewash. These barely alleviate the consequences of Israel's water warfare.

As a result, in Gaza, commodification of water is changing traditional patterns of community water management and could forever change the shape of Palestinian society. And the social stresses which follow are going to have long term impacts on communal life.

Why must churches act?

Water is a basic human need and basic needs are God-given to all of humanity to share equitably. No single community has the right to appropriate and monopolize water and control the lives of another people using water as a weapon.

All human beings must reject the notion that natural resources can be exploited for narrowly defined goals centered around profit and power. Human personhood must be respected with a reverence that is religious. God created people in the image of God and that, in turn, demands, especially in the case of water justice, that God's gifts are not viewed as mere resources. They are sanctified and consecrated.

The Ecumenical Water Network of the World Council of Churches affirms that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. In the Palestinian context, the value of human life is being undermined by the intentional targeting of civilians through deprivation of water. The global church must assert the life and dignity of the Palestinians by asserting that water is a non-negotiable human right. It must affirm the universal view and truth that water belongs to the 'commons'. It is God's gift for all to share equitably. No one can deprive others access to a fair share of water, nor can they pollute or abuse the sanctity of this basic human need.

Water offers life to the human and God's earth. Its deprivation and abuse threatens suffering and death. Water, like the presence of God, is a divine gift and must be regarded as something sacrosanct because it is an essential element for life.

The story of creation is not a mere narrative of the order in which God created the world. It is an instruction about how God expects people to be responsible and just stewards of creation.

Israel's rulers may not succumb easily to the pressures of the international community to 'act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God' when it comes to water equity (Micah 6:8). But, the international ecumenical family is obliged to demand that to 'love your neighbor as yourself' is a Biblical mandate. (Mathew 22: 39) God's gifts must, therefore, be equitably shared. When that happens, we are also obliged to remind Israel through every instrument under our command- political, social, and others, that we as Christians believe that we work for water equity because the gospel tells us that we must 'love one another as *he has loved us*' (John 15:12).

How can churches act?

In general, churches must become active subjects for 'water rights' in Palestine:

- Holding Israel accountable for its water violations. Churches must document water violations and create materials for the Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights which demand Israel act in line with the UN's International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. (Israel is a signatory)

- Churches must advocate for a rights-based approach which brings water relief to the people of Gaza with urgency. This means mobilizing international support and advocacy and campaigns that expose Israel's systemic water war crimes.

"Ninety-five percent of the water that Palestinians in Gaza have been consuming for decades has been proven unfit for human consumption. Electricity shortages that have lasted for almost a decade have limited water treatment capacity and thus the availability of water to households, as well as increased the discharge of untreated wastewater into the sea.

Muna Dajani in a policy brief titled '[Drying Palestine: Israel's Systemic Water War](#)' issued by [Al-Shabaka, the Palestinian Policy Network](#)

**Dr Ranjan Solomon has worked closely on the 'Question of Palestine' from his student days in 1967. Since 1987, after the First Intifada, this engagement grew deeper and remains at a high level of intensity until today. He now serves the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum focused on Communications and issues pertaining to Economic Measures (BDS), and the World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel. He also supports tourism networks in Palestine who seek transformation through justice in tourism*

[1] [A War Over Water Dries Up Good Will Between Jews, Arabs \(Huffington Post\)](#)

[2] [As flooding in Gaza worsens, the most basic of human rights are under threat \(The Ecologist\)](#)

Palestinians deprived of clean water, an essential human right

 water.oikoumene.org/en/whatwedo/seven-weeks-for-water/2016/simona-abderhalden



Deir Al Balah sea water desalination plant, Gaza. © EWN-WCC/Asa Elsfröm

Reflection for the first of the [Seven Weeks for Water 2016](#)

Week 6

Please note: Opinions expressed in Biblical reflections or background resources do not necessarily reflect EWN and WCC policy.

By Simona Abderhalden *

[Click here for Arabic translation \(pdf\)](#)

“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed....” (Isaiah 1:17)

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come ... ” (Isaiah 55:1)

“Access to water and sanitation is a human right. This human right is in itself essential for life and dignity, but it is also the foundation for achieving a wealth of other human rights, including the right to health and the right to development.”

(Navanethem Pillay^[1] United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights from 2008 to 2014)

Biblical affirmation of justice and peace

Justice is a key element in many religious scriptures, particularly in the Bible. The God of justice spoke through God’s prophets, always standing by the suffering and oppressed, and delivering justice to those who were deprived. Therefore, justice and peace are basic tenets of the Christian faith.

If people of faith do not respond to issues of justice and peace, we are not truly God’s followers. While spiritual

nurturing is important for one's personal peace, we all are called to be the spokespeople for those who are weak and cannot speak for themselves or defend their rights. We are called to be proponents of justice and peace, or else, as Prophet Amos reminds us, God will not accept our prayers and rituals. (Amos 5:21-24).

While there are many factors which affect the fullness of life enjoyed by people, water, food and shelter are some of the basic necessities for survival.

Water is an essential element in our lives. There would be no life without water. Every person on earth should have access to it, irrespective of their background and economic status.

On 28 July 2010, the General Assembly of the United Nations explicitly recognized the human right to water and sanitation, and also acknowledged that clean water and sanitation are essential to the realization of all human rights^[2].

However, despite this achievement, the real challenge of our day is to translate this human right into reality on the ground: 700 million people around the world still lack access to improved water sources^[3]. But still today, many people struggle to get the water they need to cover their basic needs. And all too often, it is a question of human-induced water scarcity: while some are dying of thirst, others are wasting and abusing water.

Violation of human right to water: A case study

The full achievement of the right to water is often hindered not only by natural causes (e.g., droughts and water scarcity) but mainly by human-induced causes. Water, in fact, is often used and abused as a tool of hegemony. Palestine represents a good example of this: **Palestinians' access to water**, in fact, **is severely restricted** — both in the West Bank and in Gaza — **by discriminatory policies put in place by Israel in violation of international humanitarian law**.

The 1995 Oslo II Accord aimed to establish an agreement that included access to water in the West Bank by Israelis and Palestinians. As it stands today, the Palestinians are clearly denied of their "right to water".^[4] This unequal water sharing, and subsequent violation of the agreement, in fact, has granted Israel control over almost all shared water resources, including 80% of the water from the Mountain Aquifer which represents the sole significant freshwater resource in the West Bank besides the Jordan River. Palestinian access to the latter is denied since the beginning of the Israeli occupation in 1967. Today, more than 20 years since the Oslo II Accord, Palestinian official water allocation from the shared resources have remained capped at 1995 levels, despite the fact that the Palestinian population has doubled. The situation on the ground is even worse: Palestinians, in fact, are currently extracting 10-20% less water than the Oslo agreed-upon rates as Israel hinders the development of essential water infrastructure, including the construction of wells, in the West Bank^[5].

As a result, the average domestic water consumption rate among Palestinians in the West Bank is around 70 litres per capita per day (l/c/d), far lower than the 100 l/c/d recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). On the contrary, in the illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank, the average water consumption lies around 300 l/c/d⁷.

Moreover, in Area C (more than 60% of the West Bank which is under full Israeli civil and military control) an additional restriction is in place, as a permit from the Israeli Civil Administration is also required for any type of construction or maintenance intervention. Only 1.5% of the Palestinian applications for building permits in Area C submitted between 2010 and 2014 were approved^[6].

The discriminatory permit regime in place forces Palestinians' in Area C to develop the essential WASH infrastructure without the required permits and to live with the constant threat of demolition. In violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law (IHRL), the demolition of essential Palestinian

WASH infrastructure – such as wells, cisterns, rainwater tanks, latrines and sewage treatment units – has been a consistent feature of Israel’s occupation, and remains a primary cause of Palestinian displacement especially from Area C. About 113,000 people living in 70 communities across the West Bank have no access to the water network, and therefore rely on rainwater or on expensive private vendors. They end up living on 20 l/p/d of water, which is the minimum amount recommended by the WHO for “short-term survival” in emergency and disaster situations^[7].

The water situation in the Gaza Strip does not look any brighter. Gaza’s share of the Coastal Aquifer, the only available fresh water source, is not enough to serve the needs of the 1.8 million Palestinians living in the strip. As there are no alternative water resources available, the aquifer is being over-exploited by up to four times its sustainable yearly yield. Decades of over-pumping and the contamination of the Aquifer resulting from the infiltration of wastewater, agrochemicals and saline water have severely and irretrievably damaged the aquifer. Gaza is facing a crisis as up to 95% percent of the water extracted from the Coastal Aquifer is unfit for human consumption^[8].

As a result, 60% of Gaza’s population relies on desalinated water sold by private vendors for drinking and most domestic uses^[9]. Besides the fact that the quality of such water is not regulated, it is much more expensive than the water from the networks: as a result, the most vulnerable households in Gaza end up spending up to one-third of their income on water.

Gaza is also affected by frequent electricity shortages, which negatively affect the running of water and wastewater facilities in Gaza. This results, for example, in up to 90 million litres of untreated or partially treated sewage being released into the Mediterranean Sea every day^[10].

The already critical WASH situation has been worsened by the 2014 war on Gaza, which caused severe damage (US \$34 million) to essential water and sanitation infrastructure. The post-war reconstruction and the development of the WASH sector are delayed and/or hindered by the almost decade long Israeli blockade on Gaza: as needed materials are not sufficiently allowed into Gaza, projects are delayed for years if not cancelled or not functioning. As a result, 100,000 people across the Gaza Strip are still disconnected from the water network and are relying on humanitarian assistance^[11], and 23% of the Gaza population is not connected to the sewage networks due to the damages to the wastewater facilities^[12].

Access to water is a basic need and right of every single person across the world.

Israel clearly abuses this essential and limited natural resource to exert its hegemony on the Palestinians and to achieve its goals. The limited access to water in Palestine prevents its people from developing sustainable livelihoods. Palestinians living in Area C, in particular, are often forced to leave their homes and land because of the lack of water for their basic needs and livestock (usually their main source of income) and because of the lack of essential water and sanitation infrastructure. The demolition of water and sanitation infrastructure results in forcible transfer, which is a grave breach of international humanitarian law. People being forced to leave their lands also leave room for the expansion of settlements, further hindering the possibility of justice and peace.

In Gaza, besides the negative impact on the livelihood development, the water situation, especially the poor quality of the water and the lack of proper sanitation infrastructure, poses serious health risks to the population.

There is no doubt that water issues are at the crux of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and that equal water policies are a prerequisite for the achievement of any lasting improvement in this decades-long conflict. Palestine is certainly a significant example of how the human right to water is essential to the achievement of all the other human rights.

Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” (Amos 5:21-24).

* Ms Simona Abderhalden is the advocacy officer for the Emergency, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (EWASH) group, a coordinating body of more than 20 organizations that work in the occupied Palestinian territory to improve access to water, sanitation and hygiene. Relevant biblical references in this reflection have been added by the Ecumenical Water Network.

[1] Realising the human rights to water and sanitation: A Handbook by the UN Special Rapporteur Catarina de Albuquerque Introduction, 2014, UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation

[2] [Resolution 64/292](#)

[3] Water for a Sustainable World, The United Nations World Water Development Report 2015

[4] [The Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Annex III Protocol Concerning Civil Affairs, 1995](#)

[5] Palestinian Water Authority (PWA), Status Report of the Water Resources in the Occupied State of Palestine, 2012

[6] OCHA, Under threat: Demolition orders in Area C of the West Bank, In the spotlight September 2015

[7] http://www.btselem.org/press_releases/20140212_discrimination_in_water_allocation

[8] http://www.unicef.org/oPt/UNICEF_State_of_Palestine_-_WASH_News_update_-_December_2013.pdf

[9] Data provided by the CMWU, Gaza, in 2014

[10] PWA factsheet, Water Crisis Deepens: Without Sustainable Solutions, Future at Stake, 2015

[11] Data provided by the CMWU, Gaza, in 2014

[12] Data provided by the WASH Cluster in Gaza, 2015

A Rabbinic commentary on water-sharing between Israel and Palestine

 water.oikoumene.org/en/whatwedo/seven-weeks-for-water/2016/rabbi-soetendorp



The EWN is a network of churches and Christian organizations promoting people's access to water around the world

A sink for ritual hand washing at the entrance to the Ramban Synagogue, Jerusalem. Photo: Deror Avi.

Week 7

Please note: Opinions expressed in Biblical reflections or background resources do not necessarily reflect EWN and WCC policy.

By Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp

[Click here for Arabic translation \(pdf\)](#)

Water and fire are indispensable life forces. As such, they are the gifts of God to the human being. At the same time, they can turn into destructive forces when not treated with care.

In the Biblical account and later Rabbinic commentaries one is instructed to act responsibly with the preservation and distribution of pure water. In this respect, sanitation is also a primary human responsibility. In one of the commentaries, the human being is warned not to harm natural resources like trees because there may never come another generation that will be able to set it right, so we must have responsibility across generations.

The world shows at this existential juncture two conflicting faces: on one hand, the horror of refugees desperately fleeing unbearable violent conflicts and the often shameful incapability of states and their citizens to offer adequate hospitality, and on the other hand the unparalleled readiness to take measures to protect the earth.

Judaism applauds the hopeful cooperation achieved by humanity in recent decades in preserving a healthy environment and realizing the end of acute poverty.

The unanimity of the United Nations in adoption of the sustainable global goals and the agreement reached at Paris for the measures assuring a healthy future for the whole community of life are blessed signs of hope.

In all these measures, the equal accessibility to pure water and sharing of water resources are paramount. I fully underscore the statements of EcoPeace and their recommendations.

It is my firm belief that the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is a conflict between right and right and that



thus a secure, peaceful resolution will be found.

Cooperation in providing access to pure water advances this existential process. Rehabilitation of the Jordan River is, in this respect, essential.

And there is another positive phenomenon contributing to peaceful coexistence: the different spiritual traditions have truly moved towards each other in the recognition that we desperately need each other to reach our common destiny of peace and justice. I call this coming together, a quiet, benign revolution.

The meeting of representatives of Judaism, Christianity and Islam and others at the Jordan River a few years ago was one of the most moving experiences of my life.

Let us join hands together in the blessed task of protecting the life force of water and sharing resources. And may water unite for peace.

Read also: [EcoPeace Middle East statement "Water Issues and Middle East Peace Recommendations on 'Low Hanging Fruit'" \(pdf\)](#) - Arabic translation: [قضية المياه وتوصيات السلام في الشرق الأوسط 'في متناول اليد' - مارس](#)

** Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp is an award winning human rights advocate, lecturer, writer, environmental activist and champion of civil society worldwide who is active in a wide variety of progressive, humanitarian, and interfaith organizations and initiatives. Among other activities and honours, he is the founder of the Jacob Soetendorp Institute for Human Values, chair of Green Cross Netherlands, Millennium Development Goals ambassador, and recipient of the Gold Medallion for "Peace Through Dialogue" from the International Council of Christians and Jews. He is a co-founder of GIWA (Global Interfaith WASH Alliance) of which the EWN is a founding strategic partner.*

